MIKE SHAYNE
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

47744

MARCH

75¢

THREE DOLLS, THREE CASKETS

a new MIKE SHAYNE novel
by BRETT HALLIDAY

Also

EDWARD Y. BREESE
PHILIP HALDEMAN
EDWIN P. HICKS
PAUL YAWITZ
DAN ROSS

24 ISSUES FOR ONLY $14

For a Two Year Subscription to:
MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MIKE SHAYNE *is America's most beloved detective.*
MIKE SHAYNE *is the toughest private eye in the business.*
MIKE SHAYNE *has sold many millions of copies in all editions in book form—hard-cover and paper-back.*
MIKE SHAYNE *has given his name to one of the truly fine mystery-detective magazines published today.*

And the truly exciting *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* is the only publication where you can read a brand new and especially written Mike Shayne story in every issue. Because it's often so difficult to get your favorite magazine on the present over-crowded newsstands we've worked out a special bargain offer—two full years for only $14.00—which will enable you to have the magazine delivered at your doorstep 24 consecutive months.

IF YOU ARE A PRESENT SUBSCRIBER—you can still take advantage of this bargain offer. Simply fill in the coupon and we will add two more years—another 24 issues—to your current subscription—for only $14.00.

SUBSCRIBE NOW . . . RE-SUBSCRIBE NOW . . . for the finest bargain of your crime-reading life. Two years—24 issues—yours for only $14.00. Remit an additional two dollars ($2.00) for Canada, Mexico, Pan American countries and all foreign countries.

RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC.
8230 Beverly Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90048
Kindly enter my subscription to **MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE** for two years (24 issues) @ $14.00. Add $2.00 for foreign postage.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY, STATE, ZIP NO .....

Please print MARCH—298

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MARCH, 1975
VOL. 36, NO. 3

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

THREE DOLLS, THREE CASKETS

by BRETT HALLIDAY

One by one they entered Mike Shayne's life, and one by one they died. First to go was Jody Parkinson, hard fighting reporter. She wanted much to meet the redheaded detective, but a killer cut her throat before she said why. Then someone put a ravished, dead woman in the trunk of Shayne's car. The third to die was a secretary, who made the mistake of kissing Shayne.

. . . . . 2 to 50

LEO MARGULIES
Publisher

CYLVIA KLEINMAN
Managing Editor

THOM MONTGOMERY
Editor

LAURIE ROSE
Subscriptions

NEW JOHNNY HAWK NOVELET
STURM UND DRANG
EDWARD Y. BREESE 80

A "DIFFERENT" STORY
HEART OF THE MATTER
PHILIP HALDEMAN 106

EXCITING NEW STORIES
BAIT FOR A KILLER
DAN ROSS 51
MY FRIEND, STRADIVARIUS
JERRY JACOBSON 58
YOUR HELL JUST FROZE OVER
PAUL YAWITZ 101
WINDOWS OF THE SOUL
EDWIN P. HICKS 114

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 36, No. 3, March, 1975. Published monthly by Renown Publications, Inc., 8230 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90048. Subscriptions, One Year (12 issues) $9.00; Two Years (24 issues) $18.00; single copies 75¢. Second-class postage paid at Los Angeles, Cal., and at additional mailing offices. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. © 1975 by Renown Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International and Pan-American copyright conventions. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster—return 3579 to 8230 Beverly Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90048.

THREE DOLLS, THREE CASKETS

Shayne stepped out of the Oyster Club and into the biggest pot of trouble in his career. Someone was trying to put the redhead on the hotseat, and would even kill to do it. . .And did!

by Brett Halliday

THE CHIC GIRL had the kind of legs that would make a man itchy. They were long, curved, encased in black hose. She also wore a tight red dress, and she moved with a cat's walk, gracefully on quiet steps. Hair the color of a stormy night hung below her shoulders. The hair and matching dark eyes glistened in the subdued lighting of the Oyster Club.

"Mr. Shayne?" she said.

The redhead cocked a shaggy eyebrow at the girl's reflection in the backbar mirror.

"My name is Linda Crafton," she continued. "I am Jody

© 1975 by Brett Halliday

Parkinson's personal secretary. She asked me to find you. She was unable to keep her appointment with you here. But she would like to have you come to her office in the Jacks Building. I'm to show you the way."

Shayne finished his cognac and ice water chaser before turning in the swivel bar chair. He glanced at his watch. Seven forty-five of a Tuesday night. He towered over Linda Crafton. His grin was crooked, easy. "Miss Parkinson must have provided a good description of me."

The redhead glanced up and down the crowded bar. "Business is good."

"Oh, you're easy to spot!" the girl said, and smiled.

Shayne nodded toward the front alcove. "Shall we, Miss Crafton?"

She moved on the graceful cat steps. He shortened his strides to remain abreast of her. He thought she was attractive. She looked vital. Maybe a bit too much beauty salon product. She was a fraud in another way too,—Jody Parkinson had been playing cutsies with him.

When the noted T.V. talk show hostess had first called Shayne, asking him to meet her at the Oyster Club, she had stressed both the urgency and the secrecy of the appointment.

"It's important to me, Mr. Shayne," she had said. "I must be sure you will meet me. I will be unavailable to you after I hang up. I am in a public phone booth. I make all of my private calls from a public booth, and I don't want you to later attempt to contact me —for any reason—at my office. I don't want my secretary or anyone else to know that I have a connection with you."

Shayne was accustomed to people who wanted secrecy when they hired him. Especially those people with well-known reputations who didn't want their peccadilloes to become matters of public attention—or record. And Jody Parkinson had one whale of a public reputation. The little girl who took big men—and tore them apart.

Shayne had agreed to meet with her, partly out of curiosity to know why she would want to hire him and partly out of curiosity about the woman herself. So Jody Parkinson had broken her own rules and had sent her secretary to get the redhead. Well, it was like a woman to change her mind. But was it like Jody Parkinson?

Leaving the Oyster Club, the detective was alert and wary. They were walking into the

long parking lot at the side of the club, moving away from the front bright lights. They were flanked by rows of gleaming cars, but some of the shadows back here were deep. Linda Crafton was moving on short, fast steps, her high heels clicking loudly.

"My car is over here to the right," Shayne said.

"Oh." The rhythm of Linda Crafton's steps broke. She stopped, seemed briefly confused. Then she laughed gently and put a hand on the detective's arm. "I assumed you arrived by cab. I have a car at the back. I'll run ahead and get it and you can follow me downtown."

She didn't wait for a reply. She moved out, heels clicking loudly again. Shayne watched her. She became a shadow fast. He was alert. It seemed to him that she was on the verge of bolting.

Or was it only his imagination?

He wagged his head, angled between the parked cars to the row where he had braked his car. The weight of the .45 in the shoulder holster under his coat was comforting.

The scraping sound off to his left halted him in mid-stride. He tucked his head and crouched. He stared hard. No shadows moved. Yet he felt as if he suddenly was exposed, standing on a brilliantly lighted stage.

Three cars down the line a shadow moved and became the figure of a man. An arm came up. In the instant Shayne reached for his gun, he felt himself falling into darkness. . .

. . .Shayne regained consciousness in spurts. There was the sensation that he was slipping in and out of two worlds at the whim of an unseen power. In the one world there was only silent blackness; in the other there was smell, feeling, something bathing his face with a feathery touch.

He pushed with his hands again and once more lifted his head. It was when he was in this position that the feathers traced his face. He summoned strength from an unknown source and kept his head aloft. The feathers became a familiar Miami breeze. He grunted and pushed himself into a sitting position.

He looked around. Everything was clear now. He knew that he was sitting in the front seat of his car, on the passenger side. He knew that the car was parked in a club lot that once had been full but now was empty. The Oyster Club was closed. He sensed that it was early morning. He held up his wrist. The luminous markings of his watch told him it

was thirteen minutes past two o'clock.

He passed a hand over his face. Dizziness came and went, there was a hint of nausea down deep inside him, and he knew that a helluva headache was ready to surface. But he seemed to be whole.

And that bothered him. Because he distinctly remembered the shadow of a man pointing a gun at him. On the other hand, he did not recall a blast. Still, he had been out a long time. He looked at his watch again to confirm the hour. Perhaps the bullet had grazed his skull, only put him to sleep. He tested his head with fingertips. No broken flesh. He looked for his hat, saw it crushed under his feet. He ran his hands over the remainder of his body. No leaking blood. He patted his wallet. He hadn't been rolled. He shoved a hand inside his coat. The .45 was snug in its holster.

He froze. Something had pricked the back of his hand. He removed the hand cautiously, yanked on lights. He held his hand in the dash light. Nothing. No broken skin. He examined the front of his coat, found the thorn-like object protruding from the cloth. He removed it, held it low in the light. It was a tiny dart. He grunted. He now knew why there was no pain. He had been tranquilized like an animal.

He put the dart in the glove compartment, slapped the battered hat on his skull and yanked himself across the seat. So he had been set up, knocked out. By now, the decoy, the secretary, if that's what she was, was long gone. The empty parking lot told Shayne that much. But who had set him up? Parkinson? Or was this merely a coincidence? A lot of people had it in for him. Maybe even now Jody Parkinson and her secretary were wondering where he was, angry at him for not showing up.

Shayne started his car and swung out to the street. The nausea had disappeared, the dizziness was giving way to the on-rushing headache. He pointed the car toward downtown Miami. Traffic was light, allowed him to drive reflexively.

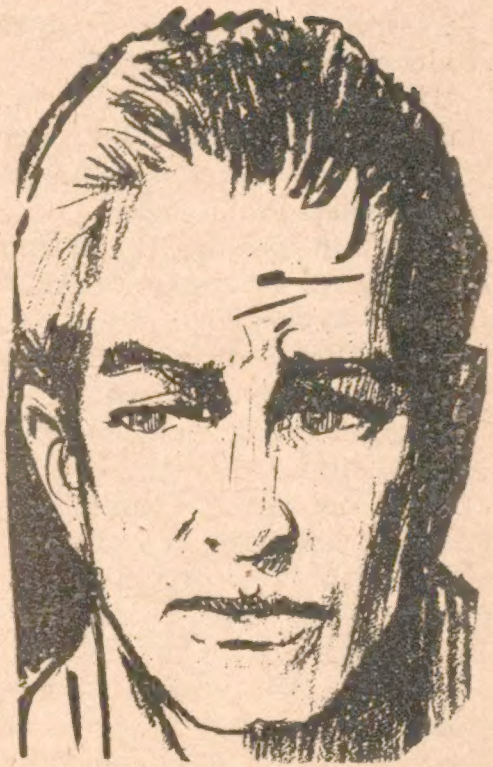
He didn't have a home address for Jody Parkinson, and didn't think she was the type to have a listing in Ma Bell's public directories. But he knew where she worked. All of Miami and most of Florida knew that. And Shayne knew he could get her address there. His old buddy, Walt Beistel, was the night watchman at the Jacks Building which housed the T.V. studios. Shayne had put in a good word for the old

derelict, once A.A. had gotten him off the bottle, and Beistel had never forgotten it.

He'd get Beistel to let him into the offices. Shayne was sure of one thing: either Jody Parkinson had set this up for her own obscure reasons or was in serious trouble herself, or else there was no connection. The red head was determined to find out which. He had a personal score to settle now. With Parkinson—or with whoever else was behind this attack on him.

He rolled along the main avenue into the downtown area. He crossed an intersection, grunted at the street name. He was only two blocks from the Jacks Building. He made a right turn, started to cruise toward the building. Two cars braked at the curbing in front of one of the main entrances to the Jacks Building made him turn into the curbing some distance behind them and brake. He stared at the sedans. They were police cars.

Shayne vacated his car and entered the building. There was a shopping plaza on the street floor, banks of law and insurance offices and the TV studio layout above. He moved on long strides across the plaza, ignoring the lighted windows of the various shops as he headed for the cluster of open elevator



doors. He seemed alone in the plaza. No other pedestrians. No cops.

Then Beistel appeared from behind a large fountain. The redhead curved toward the uniformed man who waited, thumbs hooked into a blank gun belt. He had a tanned, weathered face but he was wearing his age well with a slightly defiant air.

Shayne grinned at him. "Hi," he said, "How's it going, Walt?"

"Not too bad, Mr. Shayne," the old man said. "Still on the wagon. Eight years now."

"You're looking good, Walt."

"Feeling good, too," Beistel responded. "Gained a little weight."

"So I see," Shayne chuckled. "Hey, Walt, what is going on? I saw police cars out front!"

Beistel sniffed loudly. "We've got police detectives upstairs is what's goin' on," he said. "On the TV floor. There's been a murder. Jody Parkinson. Ain't that gonna have folks in this town talkin'?"

Mike Shayne held himself in check, attempted to remain casual. "Jody Parkinson was murdered in the studio upstairs?"

"No, not here," said Beistel, sounding as if he might be slightly disappointed. "It happened at her place, them detective fellas said. But they're upstairs, lookin' around her office, I guess."

"Do you know where she lives?"

The watchman looked excited. "You on this case, Mr. Shayne? Thought I heard one of them fellers mention your name! Say. . ."

Shayne interrupted him. "No, Walt. I'm not on the case. Not yet. But if you could get me Jody Parkinson's address, I might get in on it."

"That's easy," the old man said, waving away the ten dollar bill the redhead had pulled from his wallet. "I guess everybody knows she lives at the Sea Breeze. It's an apartment place on Biscayne. North. The ritzy part, natch."

"Thanks, Walt," Shayne said, stuffing the ten spot into Beistel's uniform pocket. "That's a help to me."

"Glad I could do it," Beistel said. "And Mr. Shayne, if I can help you any on this case. . ." He let it hang.

Shayne's grin widened. "I'll remember that, Walt. Thanks again."

II

THE REDHEAD sped north on Biscayne Boulevard. His headache hammered, but he didn't have time for it now as he attempted to recall minute details of his single contact with Jody Parkinson, her phone call. She had wanted to meet with him. She had wanted the meeting kept secret. She wouldn't discuss the nature of their business over a telephone and she had said she had been told to contact him.

Told by whom and why?

Shayne scowled. Linda Crafton. Where did she fit? Was she really Jody Parkinson's secretary? He wondered now. Had she been sent by Jody Parkinson to bring the detective? Jody Parkinson had claimed on the phone not to know him on

sight. But Jody Parkinson also was an investigative type person, skilled. So it would not be difficult to obtain a physical description of a private detective if it became necessary. And she could pass that description on to a secretary, dispatch the secretary.

But had Linda Crafton been legitimate?

Shayne shook his head. He could not rid himself of the belief the so-called secretary had been a lure, someone to get him outside the Oyster Club into darkness and open space, someone who was to make him a target for a mystery man and a tranquilizer gun.

His curiosity was thoroughly aroused now, and his instinct told him this was his kind of case. True, he had no client. He had something better. A score to settle.

There was a shallow U-shaped drive fronting the Sea Breeze. The apartment structure went high into the dark, early morning sky. But it was lighted all the way up with strategically placed, tiny floodlights to show off the modern building without being discomforting to residents. There was tailored grass and palms and tiny fountains and gleaming cars. The used cop cars, dulled by weather and wear, looked like unwanted fungus scattered among the dark but glistening heaps.

Shayne recognized the dullest sedan in sight. It was not an official car; it was a personal possession, a few years old but it had a clear title and was prized. Will Gentry had been rousted.

Shayne entered the compact, richly appointed lobby of the Sea Breeze, spotted a small, immaculate man behind a desk in a tiny alcove. The man winced slightly as the detective approached.

"Sixteenth floor, sir," the man said before Shayne could ask anything.

The redhead rode alone in one of the two self-service elevators. Sometimes it paid to be thought of as a city detective; it saved time and haggling. He walked out of the elevator into thickly carpeted comfort. The carpeting, the thick walls, the cleanliness, the subdued lighting, the furnishings reeked of security. There was a subtle air of being expensive, but one who had invaded this far into the Sea Breeze was secure.

Except the illusion had been shredded this night. One of the shredders stood across the corridor, looking bored as he guarded the door, but cooly regarding Shayne as the redhead approached. He was Bryan, a

city detective the redhead recognized.

Another gaping hole in the illusion was the open apartment door behind Bryan. Apartment doors in the Sea Breeze never stood open. They took in or disgorged, then were shut and locked.

And there was the sound of voices. The voices were used sparingly in normal tones, but they were the sounds of men at work. Which was foreign to the Sea Breeze. Men did not work at the Sea Breeze—not at three o'clock in the morning.

"Bryan," Shayne said, nodding to the city detective.

"Shayne." Bryan's look of patient boredom brightened a little.

"Biggy, huh?"

"You bet! Listen, Shayne, the chief is inside. He wants to see you," Bryan said.

"Me?" Shayne responded.

"The one and only," Bryan grinned.

Shayne entered the posh apartment.

Will Gentry, chief of Miami police, stood slightly spread-legged in the middle of the front room. He looked disheveled, as if he had put on his clothing in a hurry. He also looked sour. The jaws of his bulldog face were tight, a black cigar stub protruding slightly from a corner of his taut mouth. His eyes were bright and hard as he looked at Shayne. He was a stumpy figure, a block of police efficiency who might frighten.

"Mike," Gentry said in a flat tone, "glad you're here. I've got a couple questions to ask you, Shamus. Let's go in the other room." The burly chief gestured to the three other men detectives.

A fourth man sat on the edge of a high-backed wing chair in a far corner. He was a small man of forty-five or fifty years, impeccably dressed and groomed. He had thin, black hair, combed back, every strand in place. His face was narrow, his lips thin. He remained silent as he returned Shayne's glance. He looked worried, depressed and nervous.

Gentry didn't bother with formalities. "Come on, Mike."

Shayne surveyed from the bedroom doorway. The detectives had finished in here and the room still was neat and clean except for the powder covering the dresser, the woodwork, the doorknobs. An open door in the opposite wall revealed a bath. To the left was a large closet with sliding doors, also open and revealing a collection of feminine clothing, all very rich in color and newness.

In the opposite wall were open French doors, white and

curtained on the inside. The night breeze poured into the room and wafted the hangings of a vast canopied bed.

The body was on the bed.

Jody Parkinson was turned up on her right side, right arm extended above her head, the left arm bent across her middle, fingers still locked into the cloth of a thin dressing robe. The robe was open below the fingers, flat body and toned legs exposed. She wore undergarments, and it looked as if she had been dressing to go out for the evening, had put on the robe while waiting for the clock to tick off the minutes until departure.

She looked defenseless, and despite her reputation for toughness, Shayne felt a twinge of pity for her.

A deep lavender dress lung from a hanger hooked over the bath door. Lavender shoes sat side by side on the thick carpeting just outside the open closet doors. All she'd had to do was drop the dress over her head, zip, pat, step into shoes and depart. Except someone had sliced open her throat almost from ear to ear and a lot of her blood had soaked into the white satin quilt on the bed.

Gentry closed the bedroom door and put his back against it. His stare remained hard. "The guy out there in the front room found the body, called us. His name is Harvey Burns. He worked for Jody Parkinson. You want to lay out your tie with her?"

Shayne had been wondering how Gentry knew he'd had a connection with Jody Parkinson. Shayne shook his head. "I'm puzzled, Will. I haven't been working on anything. Things have been quiet for several days. But I did get a phone call late yesterday afternoon from the lady over there on the bed. She made an appointment. I waited, she didn't show. I went by the Studio to see why and learned about this. So I came over."

The redhead decided not to tell Gentry of the attack on him. Time enough for that later. Right now he didn't want the cops knowing everything, until he was certain of his own position. Shayne wanted as free a hand as possible, and he didn't feel like filling out police reports.

Nor did he feel like having the police butt in on what he increasingly felt was his personal case. If he learned anything that might help them while solving his own problem, he'd tell them then. After all, he reasoned, there wasn't necessarily any connection. Could have been a coincidence, as he'd told himself in the

parking lot. He'd find out soon.

"That's about all, Will," he said.

Gentry looked as if what he was digesting didn't agree with him. "Mike," he said, "level with me. Did you make a delivery for Jody Parkinson at the Oyster Club tonight? And, if you did, how much?"

"You're talking riddles, Will," the redhead said in genuine puzzlement.

Gentry reached inside his coat and brought out a letter-folded sheet of white typing paper. He passed it to Shayne. The redhead opened it and read the typed note quickly, mentally storing the contents. The gist was that Jody Parkinson had been instructed to contact a private detective named Mike Shayne and explain to him that she was going to give him a large sum of money that was to be delivered at a later date. The amount of money was unspecified.

For now, all Jody Parkinson was to do was to make the contact with Shayne, meet him at the Oyster Club Tuesday night. If she did not heed or if she went to the police she could expect her car to blow up someday—with her in it. The note was unsigned.

Shayne waved the extortion note. "I don't know anything about this, Will. Jody Parkinson didn't say on the phone, she just asked for the appointment. Said she was going to lay it out for me there."

Gentry retrieved the note. "And you didn't make a drop for her? She could've gotten a phone call after she got the letter, the extortionist could've had a change of mind, told her to send the dough with you to the Oyster Club."

"Will, I already said no."

"Okay, Mike. We'll let it go at that. Is there anything else you know that you haven't told me yet?"

Shayne shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing I can think of right now."

"Then you can cut out," Gentry said, cigar bobbing. "Be at the station tomorrow, and make that statement formal."

"Right. Mind if I talk to Bryan awhile?"

"As long as you don't get in the way, Mike, you can talk to God Almighty himself as far as I care."

Shayne grinned. "Right now, just Bryan will do."

He followed Gentry back into the living room, then quietly stepped out the front door.

III

"HOW'S IT going, Bryan," the redhead asked.

"Pretty good, Shayne," the

detective answered. "You through with Gentry?"

Shayne pulled out a cigarette and lit it. "Yeah, for now. How do you make this, Bryan? Pretty profesional job, huh?"

Bryan looked relieved at the chance to talk to someone. Empty hallways can be boring. "Professional? No, I'd say amateur. I mean, like the note we found, telling Parkinson to get in touch with you. Stupid to leave that. Just one more lead for us to follow."

"Unless it was a plant."

Bryan looked skeptical.

"Where did you find the note?" Shayne walked toward the brass spittoon-style ashtray by the elevator.

"On the dresser," Bryan said.

"Out in plain sight, huh," Shayne mused. He nodded; it was a jerk of his head. If the extortionist had come here to kill, he'd have found and destroyed his letter. Not much sense in leaving an arrow pointing to himself. "What time did all this happen, anyway?"

"Close as we can make it in the prelim work, Jody Parkinson was killed around seven. And it looks as if she was dressing to meet you when she was hit."

"The apartment is neat, Bryan. No sign of violence, forced entry. You figure she let her killer inside?"

"Looks that way. We think she even might have had a drink with her killer," Bryan put in.

Shayne squinted at the police detective.

"We found two highball glasses in the front room," Bryan went on. "One was dry, the other had about an inch of liquid in it. I'm guessing bourbon—maybe scotch—and water. We'll know later.

"Another thing, Shayne, Jody Parkinson seemed to have been an extremely neat person. Look at her pad. Not even a dust fleck. But we find her dead on a bed and two highball glasses in the front room. If she had a drink with someone, and that someone departed, the way I see it, Jody Parkinson was the type of person to whisk up the glasses, probably wash them

immediately, or at least remove them from sight. Agreed?"

"Yeah," Shayne said flatly.

"So she didn't have the opportunity," Bryan went on. "She was killed and the glasses remained in the front room. It makes us think she had a drink with her killer. It makes us think she knew her killer, was comfortable in his or her presence."

"Her?" Shayne stubbed out his cigarette in the sand filled spittoon.

Bryan lifted his shoulders slightly, glanced around. "She was killed in her bedroom. No signs of struggle, no blood spots on the carpeting. Okay, maybe there was a short wrestling match at bedside, then the killer overpowered her, forced her down on the bed. But no matter how he/she got Jody Parkinson there, that's where the woman died.

"Mike, Jody Parkinson was obviously at ease in the presence of this other person. It could have been a man or woman. Maybe she was the type who didn't think anything about a man being in her bedroom. Or, hell, maybe she had a lover. We'll never know.

"But the way we figure it, she didn't have a second thought about someone being in a bedroom with her. And the murder happened fast. She's clothed. Sex is out. Everything in the bedroom seems to be in place. No struggle. She has a single slice across the throat. No bruises, cuts, lumps, stab wounds."

"Say, did they locate the weapon yet?" Shayne asked.

Bryan lifted his palms "Not that I know of, but we're guessing a banana knife, carpet knife, maybe a surgical instrument of some kind. There's all kinds of cutting instruments—but this must be something anyone could buy in any hardware store for three, four bucks."

Shayne used a thumb and forefinger on an earlobe. "And are you ruling out robbery, theft?"

"There's a jewelry box on her dressing table, plenty of stuff inside. It looks untouched. We also found two one hundred dollar bills in a dresser drawer and seventy dollars in her purse."

Shayne lit another cigarette, mentally summarizing: Jody had received an extortion threat. She did what she was told to do: made an appointment with me. Then, dressing to keep that appointment, she has a visitor. Now, this visitor has to be important, because it causes or forces Jody Parkinson to send a secretary for me.

Shayne groaned inwardly.

The secretary! That tranquilizer must have completely dulled his mind. Shaking a cigarette up in the pack, he offered it to Bryan, who took it gratefully. "Do you know if Jody Parkinson's secretary is around?"

Bryan lit his smoke. "Why?"

"Just curious," Shayne said.

Bryan turned to the open door. "Hardgrave," he called inside.

Over Bryan's head, Shayne saw one of the detectives inside look up. "Yeah?" Hardgrave answered.

"Did Jody Parkinson have a secretary?"

Hardgrave looked at the dapper man on the edge of the chair. The little guy winced as he answered "Y-yes. . .certainly."

Hardgrave looked at Bryan. "Anything else?"

"Name?" Shayne asked.

"Amel. . .Amelia Rodster," the man on the chair edge responded under Hardgrave's glance.

"You know anyone named Linda Crafton?" Shayne pressed.

"N-no. . .I don't think so," the little guy answered.

Bryan looked at Shayne, curiosity in his eyes. "What was all that about? Who's Linda Crafton?"

"Must have had it wrong," Shayne hedged. "I thought I might have spoken to her."

"Oh," Bryan said, not understanding, but dropping the matter.

For awhile, the two men stood silent, smoking their cigarettes. It gave Shayne time to think. He needed that. He felt keyed. He itched for physical action, but the murder of Jody Parkinson was fast shaping as a case that would demand mental gymnastics. For the moment, at least, there seemed to be no one to lash out at, no one to chase and subdue.

There was no mystery in most murder cases. In most there was the victim and a limited field of suspects: a missing husband, a missing lover, a vowed enemy, someone temporarily blinded by passion or anger, a thief, a robber, a hit man. Suspects loomed. A detective could roll.

But not this night. Too many wispy cobweb trails out there: drifting, teasing, tormenting. There was an extortion threat, a beautiful girl who had lured, a shadowy figure of a man who had tranquilized. And those might just be starters.

"Bryan," Shayne said suddenly, "what's the book on the little guy?"

"Harvey Burns?"

"Yeah."

Harvey Burns had been with Jody Parkinson since she had gotten her television show. He

was a writer of some kind, employed by her personally, not by the television station. There were two other members of the Parkinson team, two investigative reporters, but they were station employees assigned to her. Harvey was her lone close associate. And he had had an appointment to phone her at her apartment at 10:30 Tuesday night; they had some future program notes to go over.

Burns had called, but he did not get an answer, of course. He had continued to call periodically. Finally he had become worried. Jody Parkinson was a click-click type person, moved on schedule. She demanded that others do the same. Occasionally, yes, there were unforeseen circumstances that would put her off track, but in that circumstance, she would have telephoned Harvey Burns, cancelled or made an appointment for later.

Anyway, around one o'clock in the morning—when Harvey Burns still had not heard from Jody Parkinson and still was unable to contact her by phone—his worry had brought him to the apartment. The ringing of her doorbell had not produced an answer, either, but a key used by the man at the desk in the lobby had. They had found Jody Parkinson dead on the bed.

"The desk man checks out?" Shayne wanted to know.

"Came in at six last evening," Bryan nodded. "He says Miss Parkinson came up here a short time later. He spoke to her as she crossed the lobby. He also says he had no calls for her, no inquiries at the desk, and that he did not see any of her acquaintances he knows enter the building—that is, not until Burns came hotfooting it downstairs this morning looking for a key."

"Burns looks ready to jump out a window," Shayne commented.

"Yeah," Bryan agreed.

Inside, Gentry opened the bedroom door and returned to the front room. The detectives were finished and the morgue boys wanted to take the body. Gentry grunted an okay, then turned to Harvey Burns.

Shayne lit another cigarette from the remainder of his present one, leaned against the door. There he could see and hear everything going on inside. Bryan said nothing.

Burns flinched slightly and looked surprised. "Yes?" he asked Gentry.

"Just a few questions, Mr. Burns. Then you can go home."

One of the three detectives came over, notepad in hand, and prepared to take notes.

Burns shook his head. There

was a folded white handkerchief in his hand and he dabbed at his upper lip.

The other two detectives moved into the bedroom.

"Mind going over your day for me again?" Gentry said patiently.

"N-not at all. . ."

Harvey Burns said he had not seen Jody Parkinson Tuesday morning but that he had spent a couple of hours with her in her office Tuesday afternoon. They were putting a future program together. It was what they were to discuss Tuesday night also. They expected to interview a city councilman, a man who may or may not be involved in kickbacks from a well-known street construction firm.

Shayne surveyed the front room while he listened. He wasn't looking for anything in particular, but he knew from long experience that a room gave off personality clues about its occupant. He spotted the liquor cabinet, the double doors left open by the fingerprint boys. Bottles gleamed at him, and Jody Parkinson had had excellent taste in bourbon, scotch, cognac, wine.

The redhead cocked an ear as Gentry said, "Somebody dropped a bomb on Miss Parkinson yesterday, Burns. Somebody threatened her and demanded extortion money. You know anything about that?"

"My God, no!"

"I thought she might've confided in you. You told me earlier you were close to her."

"Mr. Gentry, if I had known. . .if. . .well, I would have told you!"

Gentry said nothing.

Two white coated morgue attendants moved out of the bedroom carrying a sheet-covered stretcher. The lump under the sheet showed what their burden was. Shayne stepped aside as the two men came out. They waited by the elevators, then boarded the one that opened for them. The doors quietly slid shut on them.

IV

HARVEY BURNS sat shaking his head and patting his mouth with the handkerchief. "I don't. . .understand any of this," he mumbled.

Gentry took the black cigar stub from his lips, examined it briefly, then asked, "Was Miss Parkinson a wealthy woman?"

Burns fidgeted, patted. "I. . .can't say. I would think the station paid her a rather handsome salary. She seemed to live well. I mean, there's this apartment, clothing. . .really, Mr. Gentry, I can't say."

"She paid your salary?"

"Yes," Burns dabbed at his mouth again. "A good one. Not substantial, but good."

"How much?"

Burns squirmed. "Nine hundred a month."

"I figured it might be more."

"I'm afraid, Chief. . .there is a general misconception about the amount of money local television stations pay employees."

"Miss Parkinson have any other source of income? Newspapers? Books?"

"None that I know."

"Usually it's the very wealthy who get hit by extortionists," Gentry said speculatively.

"Yes, I see what you mean." Burns paused, used the handkerchief, then looked up. "But, as I said, there is a public misconception."

"Un-huh," Gentry nodded. "Probably." He chomped on the cigar butt again. "Okay, I'm curious about something else, too. Fill me in on this program of hers. Just how did it work? How did you people put it together?"

"Well. . .it's basically an interview show, of course. One designed to get inside people who are in the news, make news, or people who are in responsible public offices or seek those offices. Jody's idea was to examine these people, get inside them, so to speak, find out what made them tick, why they ticked the way they do. That calls for an investigation of personalities, naturally, and that's what our investigative team does.

"They dig out background, attempt to establish motives, examine the human side of the possible subject. Then I put it together. I mold the total package. And from that I fashion the questions Jody is to ask on camera, design the path she is to follow with a given person.

"Our show is unrehearsed, you understand, no tapes. It is very live. Jody has. . .*had* the quickness to follow basic on-air developments, but she needed the launching pad. That's where I fit."

The two detectives in the bedroom had finished their work. They came out with their evidence-bags, small plastic containers filled with likely detritus, which they placed in a large container.

"All done, Chief," one of them said.

"Goodnight men," Gentry said. The man taking notes looked envious as his two partners left. They barely acknowledged Shayne as they boarded an elevator. Gentry shifted the cigar stub in his mouth, then continued. "What's your background with her, Burns, and

exactly where and how did you two hook up?"

Burns looked mildly surprised. "Oh, it was years ago, in New York. I was a hand-to-mouth writer then, attempting to become an author. I made a few sales, fifty dollars here, seventy-five dollars there, enough to keep me at the typewriter even though I was starving.

"Well, one day Judy showed up at the brownstone. She was coming off a divorce, she had a burning ambition to be a writer, too. But she didn't sell, not even to the cheapies. And finally she gave it up. She cut for Miami. I occasionally had a letter from her. She finally got a job as a combination advertising salesman-newscaster with the station here, then wormed into doing two minutes of commentary at the end of the daily newscasts at six and eleven. Thanks to the Fair Employment Act.

"That's where her on-camera personality came out. For some reason, people were attracted to her, the average Joe with a fourth grade education became hooked on her. He didn't understand her, but he liked the way she knocked down the highbrows, the guy who Joe felt was leaning on him. It made her popular to the point she was able to go to the station

management with the interview show idea.

"They didn't buy in the beginning, of course, but she kept gaining in popularity, and finally it became economics: demand and supply. The station gave her air time. That's when she came back to New York, looking for me. She needed a gut writer. We've been a team since."

"Miss Parkinson ever married?" Gentry probed.

"Long ago." Harvey Burns shrugged. "Not important. It was one of those youth things; the marriage didn't last long, seven, eight months. His name was/is Calvin Block. Perhaps you have heard of him. He's the baseball player with the San

Francisco Giants. I understand he has remarried, has a family now."

"How about her current lovelife?"

Burns wagged his head. "Jody hasn't been interested in men in a long time."

"Not even you?"

Burns looked up, his eyes narrowing slightly as he measured Gentry. "No, Mr. Gentry. Jody and I have been friends, companions, co-workers. I liked her, but I never could live with her. I couldn't live with anyone. It wouldn't be fair to me or to the other person."

"Why?"

Outside in the hall, Shayne cocked an eyebrow at Bryan. "How come Gentry to be so soft tonight? Not like him."

Bryan grinned. "The commissioner," he said simply. "And the mayor. And for all I know, the governor. Nobody wants nobody offended."

"And Gentry took it?"

"Not him. But Burns is small stuff. Right now."

Shayne shrugged. Gentry must have his own reasons for soft-pedaling tonight. Shayne knew even a request from the President wouldn't stop the Chief if he wanted to move ahead.

In the room, the questioning continued. Gentry had moved to the other side of Burns now.

"Got any idea who might have come up here and killed her, Mr. Burns?"

The small man shook his head again. "No," he said, then paused. He seemed to have regained control of himself. "But I can tell you one thing: Jody Parkinson would not have paid an extortionist. No one bulldozed her. Ever."

"Okay," Gentry responded. Then he asked Harvey Burns: "These investigative people, who are they?"

"Barry Lane and Marcia French. Each is quite young, very good in their work. Barry may be a bit headstrong, perhaps, a bit too cautious, but some of that is his youth showing, of course. Too, I think he sometimes resorts to threats when questioning people, but he produces and Jody was sold on him. Marcia French is an excellent investigator, a digger, firm, honest."

"Young, huh?"

"Early twenties," Harvey Burns nodded. He didn't seem too interested.

"Dark hair?"

"Yes. Black." Shayne's interest picked up. Was this the girl who had met him at the Oyster Club?

"Eyes?" Gentry was asking.

"Dark. A deep brown, I think." So far so good, Shayne thought.

"Was she close to Miss Parkinson?"

Harvey Burns frowned, said slowly, "I suppose it is possible Jody confided in her, however. . ." He let the words hang.

"Anything else you can recall about her now?" Gentry asked.

"Just that Marcia French walks with a limp. Her left leg is shorter than her right; she was born with the defect, I understand."

Shayne was disappointed. Not his girl.

"Nothing else?" Chief Gentry asked.

Burns looked thoughtful. "No, I don't think so."

Gentry said, "Then that wraps it up for this morning. You look as if you could use some sleep, Burns."

"Yes," Burns agreed, standing. He tugged at the bottom of his suit coat reflexively and brushed imaginary dust flecks from a sleeve. He took a moment to look around the room before he said, "I can't believe Jody is dead, Chief. I keep expecting to find her here, conversing with us."

"Does she have family?"

"No. She was reared in an orphan's home in the Midwest, Nebraska, I think. But if it is a matter of arrangements—"

"I'll be in touch," Gentry said.

Burns nodded, went to the hallway, then stopped, turned and looked Shayne straight in the eye. "You're Mr. Shayne," he said.

Shayne nodded. The little man looked at the redhead thoughtfully. Finally Burns said, "I thought you must be." Then he went to the elevator, pushing the down button. When the doors slid open he stepped in. The door quietly closed behind him.

Shayne looked at Gentry who had come to the doorway. The Chief took the cigar stub from his mouth, examined it minutely. "So some people have a lousy opinion of private eyes," he said. "And what are you still doing here?"

The detective grinned.

"Just getting ready to leave," Shayne answered.

"Good. But don't forget, I want a formal statement from you tomorrow."

Shayne pushed the elevator button. "Wouldn't forget for the world, Will. Goodnight. Goodnight to you Bryan."

"Goodnight," Bryan said touching the brim of his cap.

The second elevator door in the bank slid open and Shayne stepped in. Turning around he saw Gentry moving back into the apartment. Bryan had resumed his quiet, alert but bored stance.

V

MIKE SHAYNE piloted his car down the ramp into the dark basement garage of the apartment-hotel building where he lived and lifted a hand in greeting to Ace Powers, the large garage attendant who was reading a magazine in the small glass cage from where he had a clear view of all the parked cars. Ace flicked fingers and flashed a wide grin.

Shayne braked the car in a slot and rode the self-service elevator to his floor. He was tired, the headache had dulled but remained, and he felt as if he was floundering in a closed fish net. The events of the last few hours, to say the least, were confusing, a true test of a man's reasoning powers. And somewhere there had to be a logical explanation. Perhaps a pattern would form with daylight.

He got a cognac and ice water chaser, stripped, prepared a steamy shower. His phone jangled.

He scowled, went to it, stood naked with the cognac in hand. It was a helluva hour for a phone call. He swept up the receiver. "Mike Shayne," he said.

"Michael!"

Lucy Hamilton's voice chased the furrows from the redhead's brow. He grinned as he listened to her explanation: she hadn't been able to sleep, she didn't know why. And then she had heard the news bulletin on the radio. Jody Parkinson had been found murdered.

"I'm involved, Angel," he admitted, "but it's too complicated to explain at this hour. Catch you later at the office, okay?"

"Michael. . ." Lucy hesitated, then plunged on. "I received a phone call just as I arrived here from the office last evening. It was someone named Barbara Johnson who wanted to see you immediately. I told her you were busy and put her off until eleven in the morning. I'll cancel her when she shows."

"Okay."

There was a brief silence in his ear, then, "Michael?"

"Yeah?"

"What's wrong? You didn't even ask what Barbara Johnson wants. Not that I can tell you. She wouldn't tell me, but you are always curious, Michael."

Shayne grinned into the receiver and sipped more cognac. Lucy Hamilton's perception never ceased to amaze him. He said, "I'm whipped, Angel, feel as if I'm in a fog. It's been a long night."

"All right," she said. "It's been a long night for me, too. I

don't know why I've been so jumpy. Can you believe I even called Tim Rourke earlier, got him out of sleep just because. . .just because. . .oh, I don't know, I guess I thought I might find you two together. It was silly, wasn't it?"

Shayne's grin widened. "See you later this morning."

He put the phone together and stood grinning for a moment.

Shayne went into the shower, grateful for the hot, steaming spray. He stayed in for a full fifteen minutes, letting his muscles relax, then shut off the hot water so that the ice cold spray hit him full force. Finished, his body tingling, he stepped from the shower and towelled himself off brisky.

Falling into his bed, he was alseep in seconds, not waking up until after eight that morning. Miami's hot sunlight was streaming into his apartment as he dressed.

He left the apartment at 9:30 a.m. after coffee royale. He moved on long strides to the elevator door at the end of the hall. The shower and short period of sleep hadn't put him in a holiday frame of mind, but the headache was gone, his eyes and mind were clear, he already had sifted, sorted and stacked the various premises of Jody Parkinson's murder, his connection with that death, and now he was heading to Will Gentry's office to file his formal statement—and see if he could get any gleanings from the burly chief of police—or his aides.

Mysteries were Shayne's lot this bright Miami morning. He had a corpse, he had an extortion threat, he had a supposedly secret meet that hadn't come off, he had a beautiful cat who had called herself Linda Crafton and who had guided him into a shadowy parking lot where he had been tranquilized by a man with a special kind of gun in hand.

There was reason behind each act. All he had to do was find the reasons. They would lead him to suspects. And when he had suspects, the case was on. He'd roll, lean hard, weigh, categorize, narrow—until he had the head of this snake.

Shayne left the elevator and entered the basement garage. His car gleamed across the way. Ace Powers had finished his night trick, gone off to drink morning beer. The detective lifted a hand absently to Joe Brown, the daytime attendant, reached the car and opened the door. He froze as the odor sifted into his nostrils.

Shayne stood without moving for several seconds, his craggy face darkening as he sniffed.

He didn't like the odor. It was a familiar smell, and it tightened his guts. He looked in the backseat of the car. No excess baggage. He went around to the trunk, studied the concrete floor. It was clean, no foreign objects. He hunched down, looked under the car. Nothing. He found the right key, shoved it in the trunk lock. The trunk lid popped up and the smell sent him back a step.

She had been curled on her side on the trunk bed. Her clothing was torn, the red dress split and ragged, the black hose shredded but still clinging to her shapely legs. Her shoes were gone. Either she hadn't been wearing undergarments or they had been ripped from her. Her throat also had been sliced open and a lot of her blood had leaked onto the trunk floor. Linda Crafton was very dead.

Shayne closed the trunk. He'd have something to add to his report this morning. He went back to his apartment and dialled Gentry's private number.

WILL GENTRY brought a team of detectives and technicians with him to the basement garage. He watched them begin their work and then he joined Shayne who stood with Joe Brown and Ace Powers. The detective had known where to find Powers. It was a popular watering hole near the hotel-apartment building.

And Shayne already had quizzed the two attendants thoroughly. Each swore no one had been within fifty feet of the car since he had parked in the stall at 4:20 that morning. Powers had logged Shayne's arrival time. Powers logged every arrival and departure on his shift. The building management didn't demand the logging; he did it to help pass time. Powers liked to sit and study the log and speculate on where a car had been between departure and return. When he wasn't reading, it kept his mind busy.

Shayne had reported all this to Gentry and the police stenographer who had come out, and had explained about the night before. The chief had been disgruntled, but let it pass. He was used to Shayne's methods.

Gentry dismissed the attendants and grunted, "So put it together, Mike."

"The Oyster Club parking lot. The guy hits me with the dart, kills the girl, takes my keys while I'm out and deposits her in the trunk."

"Un-huh," Gentry nodded, sounding as if he might be skeptical.

"The guy used her, offered

her a few bucks to lure me outside where he could hit me, then he killed her to keep her from talking."

"That's pretty weak, Mike. You're saying this unknown boy hits the Oyster Club looking for you, spots you, then flags a doll and offers her money to set you up? The guy went after you for a reason, Mike. He wouldn't take a chance on—"

"So he didn't just pick Linda Crafton out of a bar crowd to do a little work for him. He brought her to the club. She knew him. If the cops ever came around, leaned on her, she could give a name. That's why she was killed."

"That's much better," Gentry agreed. "But now explain the sexual attack. You saw the condition of her clothing. I'm talking off the top of my head, sure, but I'm saying the lab people are going to tell me the girl was raped before she was murdered."

Shayne's scowl was deep as he tugged at an earlobe. "Yeah," he agreed, "that part doesn't exactly fit. It makes you wonder why a guy intent on me would take time to rape a girl—of course, Will, I'm wondering why the hell the guy was intent on me in the first place! Who is he? How did he know I'd be at the Oyster Club?

What was his motive for tranquilizing me?"

"Got some news for you, friend."

Shayne was instantly keyed by Gentry's tone, the bobbing of the black cigar butt in the corner of the clamped lips, the brightness of the chief's eyes.

"Lab report," said Gentry. "One, Jody Parkinson was clean, no sex. Doc says her physical condition would indicate she had not participated in a sex act in weeks, maybe months. But, two: the highball glasses we picked up at her place. The liquid in one was from the melting of ice mixed with bourbon. We found Jody Parkinson's fingerprints on that glass. The other one, the dry one, also had contained bourbon. But what's really in-

teresting about it, Mike is —your fingerprints are on the glass. Just yours."

Shayne rubbed his jaw with a thumbnail and paced in a tight little circle. His scowl was heavy. "Since when do I drink bourbon, Will? Not with excellent cognac in the house! And Jody Parkinson had a supply in her liquor cabinet. I saw it."

Gentry nodded in thoughtful agreement.

Shayne lit a cigarette and speculated, "Somebody threatens Jody Parkinson, extortion, tells her to contact me. She does. Somehow the guy finds out where and when we are to get together. He goes up to her place, has a drink with her, kills her, then wipes his glass clean, takes it with him to the club where he has me lured into the parking lot. He tranquilizes me, rapes Linda Crafton, kills her, puts her in the trunk, then fits the glass in my hand to get the prints, returns to Jody Parkinson's place and plants the glass for the cops. The guy is a cool bastard, Will, gutty."

Gentry studied his cigar butt. "I'm confused. On the one hand it looks as if someone is trying to set you up as an extortionist and murderer. But, on the other, if you were the extortionist and if, for some crazy reason, you decided to go to the Parkinson apartment, if you killed her, you'd find the note, destroy it, because you'd know your name is in it. Too, I don't figure you'd have a drink with a dame, knock her off, then leave the glass with prints on it."

"That's you thinking, Will, not the killer." Shayne smoked in deep thought, continued to speculate, "I'm thrown in to confuse the cops, make all of this complicated —or someone has a large beef with me. Maybe the extortionist-killer is someone out of my past, from another case, someone I busted. Maybe he had a beef with me and with Jody Parkinson, figured to get two birds with one stone, as they say.

"Or maybe he really was after money, picked Jody because she's a personality, picked me because I'm a name in the phone book. One thing we don't know is *how* he intended to have the money delivered. Maybe the guy really figured I'd act the role of a carrier. Maybe the guy sent her the note, then got impatient, phoned her just for good measure, but found out she had her back up.

"Harvey Burns said she wouldn't bend to anyone. Okay, this changes the guy's plans. He goes up to her place, at-

tempts to lean on her, frighten her, but she doesn't scare. So he kills her because now she can identify him."

Shayne smoked, then said in disgust, "All of this is good guessing, of course—until you ask yourself: How the hell did the guy find out Jody Parkinson actually had contacted me? She supposedly made the phone call in privacy. And a second question: Where the devil does the girl Linda Crafton fit? If the guy already has killed Jody Parkinson, why go ahead with the Oyster Club play? Just to get my fingerprints on a glass?

"Let's go to the basics, Will, set aside the red herrings. The basics on the surface include two murders: Jody Parkinson and the girl over there in my car trunk. Both are dead and both died because of sliced throats. But let's go another step, let's say Linda Crafton is a red herring, too, since her only tie to Jody Parkinson that we know about is she passed herself to me as Jody's secretary and it looks as if she was killed with the same kind of weapon.

"So that leaves us one basic: Jody Parkinson has been killed. We know where, how and approximately when. Now all we need to find out is why.

"Extortion? She's threatened, she tells the extortionist to eat donuts, she's killed. Question here: was she a wealthy woman, really wealthy, the kind who is ripe for extortion? She worked for a local television station, probably a station whose budget is limited. It isn't as if she was a national figure, working for one of the networks.

"Other motives? Maybe her program. It was the kind to make enemies. Is our killer someone who was hurt by her on a past program? Or maybe somebody currently under investigation, this city councilman Burns mentioned, someone with something to hide.

"Domestic. We're told she had no lovelife, had been married long ago, but the marriage was a fizzle. So—"

"Mike," Gentry broke in, "you can forget the ex-husband. San Francisco ran a check on him for me. He's clean. He's in a hospital bed, got banged up in a motorcycle skid."

"Okay," Shayne grunted, "and passion seems out, too. The killer could've assaulted her, didn't. How about anger?"

"Anybody can blow a cork," Gentry nodded. "It figures in most murders. Killers blow, no reasoning involved. Murder is a quick, violent—sometimes reflexive—act."

"Not this kind of anger," Shayne said slowly, shaking his

head. "This is cold anger. The killer calculates. He isn't a knife-carrier ordinarily. He goes out and purchases the murder weapon for just one purpose. The weapon is now on the bottom of Biscayne Bay, undoubtedly."

"All right," Gentry said.

"Which could get us back to her program, someone she has hurt, someone she was working on."

Gentry looked sour. "We're suddenly writing off the girl in the trunk, extortion, what happened to you last night, the glass with your prints on it?"

Shayne ground out his cigarette with a toe of a shoe. "You going to book me, Will?"

Gentry snorted. "For what? So far you've cooperated. Keep doing that. And stay in town."

"Right," Shayne answered.

VI

THE LAB boys were not finished with Mike Shayne's car so the redhead rented a Hertz and drove to the Jacks Building. There was a certain secretary there he wanted to see.

At the studio, he called his offiice. There had been no calls and Shayne told Lucy Hamilton he'd check back later.

"Don't forget you have an eleven o'clock appointment with Barbara Johnson, Michael. The girl I told you about."

"If I run late, have her wait," Shayne said.

"Right," Lucy said.

The television studio hummed. People zipped here and there in what looked like normal functions. But there was an undercurrent too. Nervousness. People shot quick glances, stopped often for subdued conversation. People seemed jerky, as if they might be walking on hot coals. Jody Parkinson had been murdered. Nobody quite believed it.

Nobody wanted to.

Shayne also discovered that a secretary named Amelia Rodster was not in the office. She had called in early, said she wouldn't be in to work. But he found the two investigative reporters. Barry Lane was a young hardnose with long sideburns who didn't like what had happened to Jody Parkinson, cops, Shayne, or the bright Miami day. He took the Fifth—with a sneer—and walked out of the studio.

Marcia French was a cool head, in Shayne's estimation. She was young, tanned, collected, long ago had learned to live with the unexpected—and one limb being shorter than the other—said Barry Lane would calm in a day or two, and wanted to know how she could

assist in finding Jody Parkinson's killer.

Shayne asked her for her thoughts about potential slayers.

Marcia frowned prettily for a few seconds before saying she honestly did not know anyone who would kill. "Oh, Jody Parkinson has. . .had enemies. The nature of the program bred enemies, of course. Some people were hurt by the program; some of those people needed to be hurt, others did not. And there were the innocents who were pulled in, the wives, children, business associates, friends of those Jody Parkinson had shredded. Sometimes it was unfortunate that association carried so much blind weight. In fact. . ."

Marcia hesitated, then continued, "I guess I'm not passing along tales out of school. It's rather common knowledge around here. Barry almost went to another station in the city about six months ago. The station supposedly was contemplating a Jody Parkinson type show. Then it all fell through. I don't know what happened, but there are rumors, of course, all kinds of stories. Some say Jody talked Barry out of being competition, some say management did, some say the other station got a veiled threat from Jody and wouldn't take a chance on the heat she might produce. Take your pick, Mr. Shayne."

"You?"

She smiled. "I'm not too bad in my work and, technically, I'm on the news staff here. I don't anticipate being out of work because Jody Parkinson is dead."

Shayne said, "Tell us about Amelia Rodster, the secretary."

Marcia smoked, butted the cigarette before she said, "Amelia is a nice gal. Married, has a son. She's also a sensitive type person, sentimental. I won't tell you she was close to Jody, but if ever there was a woman Jody might confide in, it would be Amelia."

"It's my understanding Jody Parkinson made what she considered to be private phone calls outside the office."

Marcia looked mildly surprised. "You've been digging, Mr. Shayne. Much deeper than I thought. And you're right. It was a quirk with her. She had the idea there are bugs in here, phone taps. I don't think there are, but she thought so. When Jody wanted real privacy she would use a public phone outside the building.

"For instance, I might call in on some subject we were investigating, tell her I thought I had something hot. I'd have to give her the number from where I was calling and then

she'd go downstairs, return the call. That's when we conversed, and only then. I thought it weird, but it was her thing."

"Did Amelia Rodster get a replay later?"

"I don't think so."

"Harvey Burns?"

"Oh, I'm sure he did. Harvey pretty much had free rein. He could come and go. He is the only person I know who could interrupt Jody—at any time and for any reason. Here in the office, for instance, he didn't have to slow down at Amelia's desk. He just breezed past her and went straight to Jody, even if she was in conference."

Shayne tugged an earlobe. "A couple more questions, Miss French. You ever hear of a girl named Linda Crafton?"

"Linda Crafton? No."

"Would you consider Jody Parkinson a wealthy woman?"

"I wouldn't have the vaguest idea, Mr. Shayne."

"Any idea what she was being paid here?"

"None."

A phone beside Marica French jangled suddenly. She swept up the receiver, identified herself. "Yes, sir, Mr. Young. Right away."

She put the phone together. "Mr. Shayne, my employer calls."

"I'll tag along," said Shayne.

She looked at him, almost smiled, then shrugged again. "It's for sure I'm not going to physically thwart you," she said.

Rexford Young II was the station manager. He was a middle-aged executive who looked like an executive. He was well-dressed, straight, looked healthy and vigorous, calm, firm, and met the surprise visit by a private detective without a flinch of displeasure or annoyance.

He asked Marcia French to wait in the outer office and then he settled comfortably behind the polished desk in the plain, elegant office and told Shayne what he already had guessed.

Jody Parkinson had been the highest paid member of the station staff, excluding himself, of course. But that did not necessarily make her a wealthy woman. It allowed her to invest with discretion. She could slowly build a savings nest egg. She could live well, but he would not consider her to be a person financially ripe for extortion.

Then Rexford Young II frowned over the prospect of naming persons in his acquaintance who had the emotional, mental, physical qualities to kill, finally decided he would not even hazard a guess, but he could speculate on the future of the Jody Parkinson show. He

felt qualified to do that. The show would continue for a month; four shows were lined up. After that, he couldn't say. He had an appointment with the station owners that afternoon to discuss the future.

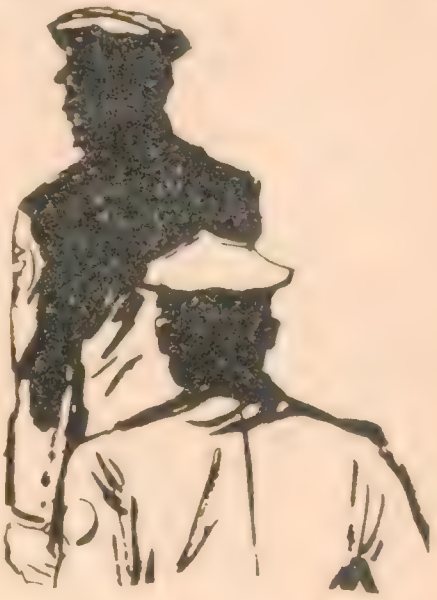
Shayne thumbed his jaw. "I thought the Jody Parkinson show was live, Mr. Young."

"It is," he nodded. "We have a young man, Barry Lane, who can carry the four programs. I meant that Jody Parkinson left the outlines of four programs in her files. Lane has filled in for her in the past."

"Is he good enough to get the show in the future? Permanently."

Young frowned slightly before replying, "The young man has the talent, but he also has an irritating malfunction. He occasionally goes down the bottle. Things pile up, some men finally explode, rant and rave around the office, berate fellow employees. Other men explode at home; wives become whipping posts. I go to a lonely beach I have found, throw pebbles, shells, beer cans, anything that has washed up.

"Barry Lane takes his bottles to bed for a couple of days. It's his release. I don't think the station owners are going to chance riding with Barry. It's too bad. The boy is good. But he could be in bed with his bottles on a day he should be on-camera. That is a definite risk, Mr. Shayne."



"Is that what cooled the other station on him, Mr. Young?" Shayne asked.

Young looked surprised before he nodded, "I've been told it is."

"Were you also told who provided that information about Lane?"

"I didn't have to be, I guessed, but I was told."

"Jody Parkinson," Shayne said.

Young stared speculatively at the redhead for a few seconds before he said, "Mr. Shayne, if in my future I find need for a private investigator, I think I shall shadow your doorstep."

"You'll find a welcome mat

out for clients," Shayne said flatly, standing. "By the way, ever hear of a girl named Linda Crafton?"

"Crafton? No."

VII

MARCIA FRENCH flicked fingers and a smile at Mike Shayne as the redhead departed. Outside, the Miami day had become hazy and the smell of approaching rain was strong.

Shayne looked at his watch. It was ten minutes before noon. He went to a public phone and called his office. Barbara Johnson had not shown for the eleven o'clock appointment or called in a cancellation. He told Lucy he was going to lunch.

He ate in a diner and returned to the street inside twenty minutes. But not until after he had made a phone call from the diner, caught Marcia French still upstairs in the Jacks Building. From her, he had obtained a home address for Harvey Burns, Barry Lane and Amelia Rodster.

Marcia had added, "And I'm at 4550 Blueberry, Apartment 2-E—in case you're ever interested."

Shayne had put the phone together with a brief grin, then had jammed his hat on his head. The afternoon promised to be busy.

The Rodster home was a neat, medium-priced, flat house in a clean neighborhood of bungalows and green grass and colorful flowers. Shayne left the rent car at the street curbing.

The woman who opened the door to his knock was pretty in an elfin sort of way in spite of the tension that showed in her cheeks and eyes and quivering fingers. She also was married to a garage mechanic and they had a small son who was at a day school.

Amelia Rodster had needed the day for herself. She agreed to talk to Shayne because she had had a telephone call from Marcia French who had said the redhead was an all-right guy. But she didn't have any ideas about who had killed Jody Parkinson, or why.

"All I understand, Mr. Shayne," she said, her voice vibrating, "is that Jody is dead!"

She sat turned slightly on the edge of a living room chair, knees rubbing slightly in nervousness, interlocked fingers working in her lap. She was taut, but she suddenly was glad Shayne had come to her door. She felt as if talking to someone about all that had happened might be good for her.

"I liked Jody," she said, "as a person. I probably am one of the few people who did. She

wore a hard outer shell, Mr. Shayne, but there were soft spots underneath. She had her black moments, depression, worries, wondering, like all of us. But she was a master at hiding feelings in public. Somewhere in her background she had learned how to conceal."

"You know about her calling me yesterday afternoon, making an appointment for last night?" Shayne asked.

"No," the woman said, frowning and wagging her head. "But then that is not unusual. Jody often made phone calls outside the office. She used a public telephone for private calls. She had this. . .this hangup about our phones at the station being bugged. They aren't, but—"

"Yes, I've heard," the redhead interrupted. "Okay, ever hear of a girl named Linda Crafton?"

"No."

"That name doesn't ring any kind of a little bell from anywhere?"

"No." Amelia Rodster was positive.

Shayne thumbed his jawline for a couple of seconds. "I almost was hoping you might be able to relate her to Barry Lane," he said.

"To Barry?" Amelia Rodster looked surprised. "I don't understand, Mr. Shayne. Is Barry—" She shut off the words suddenly, sat twisting her fingers. Then she looked straight at Shayne. "Please try to understand. I don't like Barry Lane, nor does he care for me. It's just one of those natural dislikes. I can't explain it. All I'm sure of is, Barry Lane is a cold, cruel, arrogant young man."

"Who would like to be named to fill Jody Parkinson's shoes on the air."

"Yes," nodded Amelia Rodster.

"What's his chances?"

"None, I hope."

"How do you feel about Harvey Burns?"

"Harvey? Well, he's. . . different. He's a difficult person to get to know, really. He's. . .he's solitary, I guess you'd say. Jody probably was the only person in the world Harvey would be comfortable with. He must be terribly distraught today."

"He and Jody Parkinson were a pretty good team, I understand."

"Oh, my, yes. Jody depended on Harvey. He has a knack for sifting fact from conjecture, fiction, whatever you want to call it. Jody trusted Harvey. He is a thinker. I don't think I know another person like him. He calculates, weighs everything.

But I suppose he acquired some of that trait while in prison. I suppose. . ." She paused, looked at her hands.

"Oh, I'm not sure I should have said that, Mr. Shayne. It isn't general knowledge. But. . .well, I've said it. Harvey Burns was sent to prison a long time ago. Jody told me it was before she knew him in New York. I think he had been out just a few months when she met him."

"She tell you why Harvey was in prison?" Shayne pressed.

"No, never. But I'm sure she knew."

"And you can't fill me in on any of his personal life now, huh?"

"No. Oh, I know he lives alone, and rather modestly. I don't think there are any women in his life. I think he spends a tremendous amount of his free time reading. He seems to know books and authors. And at the end of some working days he goes downstairs to the cocktail lounge in the Jacks Building. Many of the people in the office do. The lounge is a popular place around four-thirty in the afternoon."

Shayne nodded and stood. "I won't take any more of your time, Mrs. Rodster. You've been a help, filled in a few holes for me. Thanks."

She remained seated, bobbed her head once. Shayne went to the front door, and then she said, "Mr. Shayne, I'm curious. Why did Jody feel she needed your kind of services?"

He explained briefly.

"Extortion," Amelia Rodster mused. She shook her head. "Jody would not have paid," she said. "Barry Lane is a fool."

"Why Lane, Mrs. Rodster?"

She shook herself from her thoughts and stood. "I shouldn't have said that. Please forget it. It's just that. . .who else would try such a thing?"

"What did Lane do to you, Mrs. Rodster?"

She flushed. "Nothing."

Shayne stood waiting.

She remained pink and nervous. "I turned him down. . .in no uncertain terms," she said finally.

The detective made a diplomatic departure. Leaving, he pointed the rent car toward downtown. Harvey Burns and Barry Lane lived miles away and apart, both addresses on the opposite side of the city. He decided to stop at his Flagler Street office; catch a brief resume of the day's routine from Lucy, then phone Gentry.

He found Lucy to be busy on a quiet day. She was cleaning up many office loose ends. But she was willing to stop and listen to everything Shayne could tell her about the Jody Parkin-

son and Linda Crafton deaths.

"Later, Angel," Shayne said, heading toward his private cubicle. "See if you can get Gentry on the line."

He fingered quickly through the stack of envelopes on his desk, pushed the mail aside, totally uninterested, and swung his swivel chair around. He thumbed his hat to the back of his head and stared out the window. Miami was darkening. Rain clouds were rushing in now. He reached up to the second drawer of a filing cabinet and took out a bottle of Hennessey's. As he drank from the bottle, he wondered if young Barry Lane had gone to bed with his juice.

The jangle of the phone on his desk brought Shayne around. He reached out with left hand and grabbed the receiver. Will Gentry sounded busy and impatient until Shayne asked him to check out Harvey Burns' prison record in New York State. Gentry became curious and interested. Finally he said:

"Okay, shamus, got a little info for you, too. Your Linda Crafton really was a Nancy Jean Faulkner, native born and reared. Got a mom and dad right here in the city, a sister who is a nun in Chicago. But Nancy Jean went astray, it seems. Skin artist, go-go, topless waitress, hustler. We've got a rap sheet on her for the hustle. Three pickups, no convictions."

"A hustler raped, Will?" Shayne frowned.

"Why not?" Gentry grunted. "Or maybe the killer only wanted us to think it was rape. Either way, one thing's sure, according to the lab people: she'd had sex not long before death—of course, that may be like saying an alcoholic had had a drink before she cashed in."

"She would've been an easy girl to hire," Shayne said thoughtfully. "Say fifty bucks for a quick trick—like pulling me from a bar out into a dark parking lot. The guy hits me, then turns on her. She can identify him, and she has fifty bucks of his dough he can return to his wallet. Then somewhere along the line the guy becomes sexually aroused and. . .

"Hell, I don't like it, Will. Too much happening. The guy is too busy. He's just killed Jody Parkinson. He hotfoots it out to the Oyster Club, spots me, turns himself up a girl who doesn't ask too many questions about how she earns fifty bucks, knocks her down, then hits the girl—but he stops to rape her? I don't like it. The guy has to have too many other

things on his mind for rape. Rape can come another day, when he isn't so busy."

"Unless we're looking for a sickie," Gentry speculated sourly.

"So why didn't he sexually attack Jody Parkinson? He was in her bedroom, in privacy —and she wasn't exactly a zombie."

"Yeah." Gentry said heavily. He paused, then: "I'll see what kind of a sheet I can turn up on Harvey Burns. Stay in touch, Mike."

"I've got no plans to go anywhere," Shayne said.

"Good," Gentry growled.

Shayne put the phone together, leafed a directory, found the number for the Oyster Club, was informed the club did not open for business until five o'clock in the afternoon. It was a few minutes after three. He looked up numbers for Harvey Burns and Barry Lane, dialed each, got rings, no answers.

He sat back in the swivel chair, scowled, the ridges in his brow deep. Absently, he drank, returned the bottle to the file drawer. Outside, lightening flashed and thunder cracked. He swung around in the chair. No rain yet. He was on edge. His heavy legs twitched. He needed action, a good solid lead to the killer of Jody Parkinson and Linda Crafton—assuming they were killed by the same person.

He pondered the possibility of wanting two killers. His scowl deepened. Could the slayings be unrelated? His thoughts churned. He moved around restlessly in the chair as the rain suddenly came in wind-blown waves. Then he sighed and stood abruptly, yanked his hat in place. He cast off the speculation. All he seemed to be doing was complicating the already complicated.

Where to find a dangling end of a loose slip knot? The bar in the basement of the Jacks Building? It was said to be a watering hole for the television people, and the TV people still would be talking among themselves, still would be caught up in the enormity of murder. Maybe he could pick up an interesting tidbit or two. It was better than just sitting and waiting for the Oyster Club to open.

Shayne lifted the wrinkled raincoat from the ancient hatrack beside the door and slid into it as he stopped at Lucy's desk. "Cut out anytime, Angel. I won't be back."

"All right," she nodded. She looked mildly concerned as she tore the top sheet from her note pad. There was a single penciled notation on the sheet, a name: *Barbara Johnson.*

Lucy wadded the paper and tossed it in the waste basket. "Scratch one Barbara Johnson."

"She's bothering you?"

"I don't know what it is, Michael, but there was something about her call. . . Last night it seemed very important to her that she see you, then today—nothing."

"Maybe she found another solution to her problem."

"Maybe," Lucy added.

VIII

MIKE SHAYNE dismissed Barbara Johnson from his mind when he reached the Flagler Street door. Rain was falling so hard it had formed a shallow river on the sidewalk. He could see the rent car and the sight tugged at his impatience. He dashed across the empty sidewalk and dived into the front seat of the car. Then he sat for a moment, shaking water from himself, much as a dog shakes off a bath. He found the key, stuck it in the ignition, got the car motor and wipers going.

And the rain abruptly stopped falling.

He grunted. Was the pattern of the rain an omen? Was patience the dangling end to the loose slip knot?

The Jacks Bar was a small, dim, comfortable lounge with an L-shaped, padded bar, a tight assembly of tables and captain's chairs flanked on three sides by leather booths. At four o'clock in the afternoon it seemed to be doing a modest, in-building business.

Shayne had the feeling he was the only man in the house with a raincoat. When his eyes had adjusted to the dimness, he saw Harvey Burns, Barry Lane and Marica French staring at him from one of the booths. Marcia smiled and lifted a hand. Her fingers beckoned.

Harvey Burns seemed a bit apprehensive as the redhead shrugged out of his coat. "Mr. Shayne." It was half greeting, half question.

Barry lane wasted no time. He was immediately offensive.

"Hey," he said loudly as a pert blonde girl took Shayne's coat and order of cognac and ice water chaser, "the celebrity!"

He stabbed a newspaper on the table with a forefinger. Shayne saw the reproduced photograph of Linda Crafton and the headline that screamed her death. "Found dead in your car, man!" Lane said loudly. "Raped and dead! Tell me, how does a guy rape a whore?"

"Barry," Marcia French chastised, "tone down. Everyone is looking."

"So let 'em look!" Lane bellowed drunkenly, waving a hand wildly. "It isn't every day you get to see a man who rapes and kills a whore!"

Harvey Burns gulped down his drink quickly, Marcia squirmed, and at a nearby table two men stared. Lane continued, "Boy, a guy who rapes a whore. . ."

It was all he got out. Shayne brought his hand up quickly in a slashing swipe.

The back of Shayne's hand lifted Barry Lane's nose. Lane followed the nose, half-standing before plopping back into the booth seat again. He yelped. And then the blood suddenly flowed from his nostrils. He got out a handkerchief swiftly, plopped it against his face as he skidded from the booth. He moved away, stopped abruptly, whirled. His eyes were dark daggers shooting at the detective. He almost crouched. He trembled with rage.

He hissed, "I'll get you, Shayne. . .you've had it, man!"

Fresh blood flowed from Barry Lane's nose, colored his teeth, curved in tiny rivers around his mouth. He clamped the handkerchief against his face again and weaved out of the lounge.

Shayne sat heavily in the booth seat.

"Wheee," Marcia French breathed, breaking in on the detective's thoughts.

He shot her a hard glance. A tiny smile played at the corners of her unpainted lips as she calmly returned his look. Her eyes asked silent questions, she was curious, but the eyes told him that she was not offended or frightened or displeased.

"You do come on rather heavy, Mr. Shayne," she finished with a sudden, genuine smile.

Next to her, Harvey Burns went to his well quickly, finished the highball and left the booth. "Mr. Shayne," he said with a snap nod. He was slightly flushed, his lips drawn, tiny cheek muscles twitching. He shuffled briefly, then added lamely, "I must be running along."

"What did you do time in

prison for, Harvey?" the redhead asked bluntly.

Burns went rigid. He stared. His eyes hardened briefly then gave way to uncertainty as the waiting Shayne matched the stare. Burns went under. He turned without a word and moved out of the lounge fast.

Shayne watched the departure. He was tempted to go after Burns, pin him against a wall until he had an answer. But Burns could become a mummy. Cons learned how to clam.

Across from the detective, Marcia French said, "Harvey has been in prison?"

"Yeah."

"Wow."

She drank as a new bulk appeared at Shayne's shoulder. The bulk was a large, grinning man who was running to fat, and who had come from the nearby table. He shoved out a hand, looking for a shake.

"Thanks, friend," he grinned. "Lane was beginning to lean on my eardrums. I'm glad you came along. Name is Tanner, Joe Tanner. You're Mike Shayne, the private eye, aren't you?"

"Yeah," the redhead responded.

"Well, you're a little out of my class," Tanner said, "But I could have used you last week. Somebody broke in our supply shed and stole a couple of things. Tranquilizer gun, darts. Junk stuff, but I sure miss that gun. Costs a fortune!" Before Shayne could respond, Tanner extended his hand. "Well, glad to have met you. And thanks again, for busting Lane!

Shayne shook the hand cordially and the man returned immediately to his table and drinking companion. Shayne digested the information he had just received. He had a hunch that the stolen weapon was the gun used on him.

The blonde waitress appeared with the cognac and ice water chaser on a tiny tray. She put the glasses before Shayne with a practiced sweep.

Shayne looked around her. "No bouncer?"

"Just me," she said pertly.

Shayne shot a look at Marcia French. She covered her glass with a palm. She seemed in deep thought. Shayne put a five dollar bill on the blonde's tray, "Don't forget where we're sitting."

"How could I, Red?" She departed with an interesting twitch of young hips.

Marcia French repeated softly, "Wow. . .Harvey Burns in prison."

"Opens new doors?" Shayne cocked an eyebrow.

"No," Marcia said quickly, looking directly at him. "It's

just. . .news to me. Intriguing. How did you find out?"

"Amelia Rodster."

"Ahh." Marcia nodded. "So Jody and Amelia did occasionally wiggle bare toes across a coffee table. I thought so."

"Tanner," said Shayne. "Something about him tells me he is a regular here."

"Joe? Sure, everybody here knows Joe. He's a nice guy. Why?"

"He own some kind of zoo for kids?" Shayne asked.

"I think he calls it an animal farm."

"The name is familiar," said Shayne, drinking cognac. "I guess I must have seen ads in the newspapers or something."

It fitted. One strange weapon accounted for. A weapon anybody could have thought of, probably picked up. Shayne wondered if the zoo's supply shed was usually locked, decided it didn't matter.

Marcia lifted her glass, sipped slowly.

Shayne spoke up suddenly, shifting and hunching over the table in abrupt interest. "You, Marcia, tell me about Nancy."

She sat back in the booth, fingers spinning her glass as she cocked her head slightly and looked at him. The contemplation was brief. She sat forward again, and said, "You do come on heavy, Shayne. No bargains, no guarantees, just give—and you make a girl feel like she should. Okay. . ."

She fingernailed the newspaper photo. "You failed to mention all of this had happened to you when you were upstairs this morning. Except to ask if I knew a Linda Crafton. I didn't, and I don't. But I know who the girl in the paper is, was. Nancy. She was—"

"Nancy Jean Faulkner," Shayne nodded.

Marcia caught her lower lip, cocked an eyebrow. "Okay, Nancy Jean Faulkner. All I know was Nancy. She was in and out of here, ran in streaks sort of. She'd be a regular for a couple of weeks, then disappear, finally return. Lately, she's been around again."

"Doing what?"

Marcia shrugged. "I don't know."

Shayne finished his cognac, waved to the blonde waitress for more.

Marcia said, "I suppose she was working. The various men she left with can't *all* be Little Theater enthusiasts."

Shayne frowned.

Marcia shrugged. "Nancy had a yen. She wanted to be an actress, I think. Wanted to be on stage. She's appeared in some amateur stuff around the city. She was going the Little Theater route. Boy, I'll bet there's

some stirrings among the amateurs right about now."

Shayne took the cognac and the smile the blonde waitress offered, digested both, waited for her to wiggle away again, and then said, "I've got to run out to a supper club, ask a few questions. Maybe we can grab dinner."

Marcia smiled, spun her empty glass. "Damned if I don't think I've just been offered compensation rather than a proposition." The smile became a grin. "You're okay, Shayne. I like you. But I've got a nine p.m. date. Wish I didn't. But I do, and he's a nice guy, too. So some other time, maybe. How did I help?"

"Never mind," Shayne grinned. "But you did."

"Glad to hear it, Clam," Marcia smiled.

Shayne left the booth seat. "Give you a lift home?"

Marcia joined him. "Are you sure you know how to operate on a two way street? It's the kind I live on and so far this has all been—"

Shayne took his coat from the blonde waitress and dropped it over Marcia French's head. He winked at the waitress and asked Marcia, "You got a coat? It's raining outside."

"You can't be this large," she said from inside the folds of the coat. "No way!"

They moved out. Joe Tanner waved to Shayne from his table. "Hey! Thanks again, friend. You got kids? I've got an animal place. Tanner Animal Farm. Maybe you've heard of it. Never mind. It's a place for kids. Bring yours out, and yell for me when you do. I'm usually in the office. Give you a special tour—just for belting Lane. I've been wanting to do that to the bum myself for many months!"

Light rain was falling when Shayne and Marcia French walked out of the Jacks Building shopping plaza to the sidewalk. Off to the detective's right and out in the street there was a pile up of cars and pedestrians. He saw an ambulance move out, red lights flashing. Slick streets probably had caused a crash.

Shayne put Marcia in the rent car and pulled out, moving away from the congestion. She left him at the curbing in front of her apartment building. She shrugged out of his coat, lifted herself with a grin and lightly kissed his cheek.

Shayne arched his brows.

"I just had to do that," she said. And then she was out of the car and limping across the sidewalk. She flashed him a look and wiggled fingers from the doorway of the building and disappeared inside.

IX

SHAYNE DROVE slowly to the Oyster Club, killing time. He wore a half grin most of the way as he thought about Marcia French. But at the club, the grin disappeared. He could not find anyone among the employees who remembered ever seeing the girl pictured in the newspaper.

It didn't mean the girl hadn't been in the club the previous night. Many people were in and out; traffic was heavy; business was good. It probably only meant she wasn't a regular.

Shayne was in a sour mood again as he headed back downtown. The journey to the Oyster Club had been a waste. Perhaps he should have remained at Jacks Bar, nosed. Jacks could be the focal point. The television people watered there, Linda/Nancy had worked in and out of there.

Was the killer of Jody Parkinson one of her cohorts? Harvey Burns, for instance. Harvey was close to her, knew her habits, probably knew all of the routes in and out of the building where she lived. And Jody Parkinson would open a door to Harvey's ring. With a little luck and some dexterity, Harvey probably could slide in and out of her building without being seen.

But Jody Parkinson had been Harvey's existence. He had lived off her, almost like a leech. Why would Harvey kill her, cut off his lifeline?

Barry Lane was a different breed of cat. He was ambitious, arrogant, headstrong, and he had a beef with Jody Parkinson. She had kept him from getting his own show. But with her out of the way, the door to that show might reopen. Was killing Lane's way of getting on-camera?

There still was all of the fringe play: the extortion note, bringing in a private detective, a stranger to all of these people, the tranquilizing, the glass with the fingerprints so conveniently left for the cops to find, Linda/Nancy. . .

Shayne slammed the steering wheel with a palm. Damn, it was confusing!

But he almost had convinced himself now that the extortion bit was fringe. Murder was the real case, and with that premise, it was easier to start closer to home. When looking for a killer, always begin close to the house. It was a helluva lot simpler than chasing strangers. The strangers could come after all of the leads tied to the victim had fizzled.

The detective returned to the Jacks Bar. Shayne looked around. Business had picked

up, but all he saw was strangers. Except the pert blonde waitress. She gave him a half curious, half inviting twist of a smile.

Shayne spotted a public phone in a dim corner. He went to it and called Will Gentry. The police chief had received a rap sheet on Harvey Burns. Burns had been convicted and done time for rape.

"It doesn't hang him, Will," Shayne said, thinking hard. "Motive? Jody Parkinson was the guy's blood."

"Extortion. Maybe the guy wants to go back to New York. Maybe he figured to cash in for a few chips here and cut."

"Maybe," Shayne scowled. "Okay, be in touch."

"Yeah."

Shayne put the phone together and turned from it slowly. The blonde waitress stood before him, tray extended on a palm, cognac and ice water on the tray, a smile on her lips. "My name is Jane."

"Hi, Jane."

"Hi, Red."

"You know Nancy Faulkner?" The detective asked. Jane looked disappointed.

"Oh, yeah, I knew her. But what happened to her! Say, ain't you. . ."

"Was she in here yesterday?" Shayne interrupted.

Jane eyed the big redhead.

"Nope. Not that I know of, anyway."

"Barry Lane in? Or Harvey Burns?"

"Nope—some of the regulars, like those last two you mentioned, weren't in yesterday, that's all. Except. . ."

"Except?"

"It's kinda funny. . ."

"What's kinda funny, Jane?" Shayne pressed.

"Barry. He never misses. Harvey. . .well, he's a three, four night a week man. He skips an evening occasionally. But Barry seldom misses. He's what we call a *regular* regular. He could be dying and he'd crawl in on his hands and knees. Yesterday, he didn't. That's what's kinda funny."

Shayne put a five dollar bill on her tray. "Thanks, Jane."

"The drink was on me, Red."

"Thanks anyway."

"Ahh. You're a cop," she said.

"Private."

"Heavy, man. See you around—I hope."

Shayne strolled to the phone, dialed Marcia French's number. Lane could have been on assignment Tuesday afternoon and evening, he could have been hung somewhere and unable to get to the lounge. Burns also could have been too busy to get in. On the other hand, if one of them had set up the extortion play, how would he be sure Jody Parkinson had followed instructions and contacted a private detective? He could detour from habit, watch Jody Parkinson, see her make a call from a public phone booth. That's how.

But how would the watcher know who Jody was calling?

Had a detective been trailed from his office to the Oyster Club? Shayne winced. He hadn't paid any particular attention while driving out to the club; there hadn't been any reason to.

Marcia French did not answer the ringing of her telephone. Shayne finally gave up and scowled at his watch. A few minutes past seven o'clock, and the girl had said she had a nine o'clock date. Of course, she could have ducked down to the corner drug store for some needed item.

He waited twenty minutes and tried the number again. No answer. He left the Jacks Building and drove through the light rain to 4550 Blueberry. Apartment 2E was easy to find. He knocked on the door several times, finally put his ear against the door, used it as a sounding board. He heard nothing.

The building manager was a gnarled man who didn't like the idea of disturbing a tenant. But he didn't want cops swooping down on his place, either. He opened the door to Marcia French's apartment. There was lamplight. Across the room, a drape dangled as if someone had ripped it from its rod.

Shayne shoved inside, ignoring the manager's protests. He stomped through the apartment and found Marcia French naked in a tub of bath water. A drape cord around her neck had choked off her life.

Shayne called Gentry. The building manager had lost his voice and his strength. He sat sagged on the edge of a chair, and he continued to sit as Shayne prowled. The detective examined the front door minutely. There was no evidence it had been forced open.

Had Marcia known her killer, let him inside? But she had been bathing. Okay, maybe the killer was her date. He arrived

early, was sitting in the front room while she prepared to go out. He yanked down the cord while she was in the tub.

But why had she been killed?

Shayne pulled his earlobe and attempted to put all of the deaths in one package. He didn't like the common denominator he came up with. His scowl deepened.

Jody Parkinson's death had been set up to make him a strong suspect as the killer. His name had been in the extortion note, the note had been left for the police to find, and there was the glass with his fingerprints on it.

Then Linda Crafton/Nancy Faulkner had been found dead in the trunk of his automobile.

Now, tonight he had brought Marcia French to her apartment. People at Jacks would remember he had left the lounge with her. He easily could be tied to the three deaths by suspicious cops who might figure the private eye suddenly had gone off his rocker, kill-crazy.

Had he been set up all the way? Was that the real motive for each death: make Mike Shayne a killer?

If so, who was leaning on him? Who harbored an old grudge? Who had a new beef? Who wanted him put away?

Take it logically. Anyone could have started the ball rolling, sent Jody Parkinson the extortion note, got her to call the detective to set up a meet. And anyone could have hired Linda Crafton to lure the detective into a parking lot, then killed her and stuffed her in the trunk of the detective's car.

But who had seen him leave the Jacks Bar with Marcia French? Who had followed them to the apartment building, watched Marcia go inside and him drive away? Who had gone upstairs, got Marcia to open the door, been invited to sit in the front room while she bathed? Who would she be that comfortable with?

Who had threatened Shayne that very afternoon?

He returned to the telephone and called Amelia Rodster. To her knowledge, Barry Lane had not been working on an investigation that would tie him hand and foot. In fact, he had been in the office most of Tuesday afternoon. He had departed around four o'clock.

But didn't stop at his regular watering hole, Shayne thought grimly.

"It's awful, isn't it?" Amelia Rodster went on. "First, Jody and then that girl I read about in the afternoon paper, and now Barry being struck down by a car and—"

"Hold it,"Shayne interrupted.

"Give me that last part again."

"Why, I thought that was why you were inquiring about Barry, Mr. Shayne! I thought you were investigating! Barry was struck by a car this afternoon, outside the Jacks Building. One of the other girls in the office saw it happen. She called me here this evening. Barry is in the hospital."

Shayne remembered the ambulance he had seen pull away from the Jacks Building. "Okay, thanks, Mrs. Rodster," he said reflexively. He put the phone together without telling her about the death of Marcia French and turned with a heavy frown as the police entered the apartment.

For the second time that day, Shayne made a formal statement. This done, he left Marcia's apartment. He breathed with relief when he got into air outside.

Too many coincidences, Shayne thought. And only one mild-mannered dapper, and once convicted rapist could have joined all the pieces.

X

HARVEY BURNS lived in a modest apartment building in a quiet neighborhood. His apartment was on the ground floor and he opened the door immediately to Mike Shayne's ring. His face fell, he lost some color, he shuffled, but he swung the door open to the sudden entry of the detective.

Despite his nervousness, Burns looked as if he had been relaxing. There was a footstool in front of a deep chair, a lighted lamp behind the chair, an open book face down beside the chair. He wore sharply creased trousers and polished shoes, but he had shed his coat and necktie. His white shirt was open at the collar.

Shayne hit him between the eyes with accusation. "You're been busy the last twenty-four hours, Harvey. Jody Parkinson, then the Faulkner girl and now Marcia French." The suddenness of the verbal assault shattered Burns' carefully controlled attitude.

"No!" he burst, crouching slightly, his lips working, eyes dancing.

"The killer had to be someone close to Jody and Marcia," Shayne pressured. "Someone either of them would let inside an apartment without thinking twice about what they were doing, someone they could talk to through a door while they went about preparing to go out."

"Crazy!" hissed Burns.

"Opportunity," continued Shayne. "Going down to Jacks Bar at the end of a working

day is a habit, but you missed yesterday. Oh, I know, you miss on other days, but you missed *yesterday*. And Jody Parkinson was killed *yesterday*. Then tonight you left the lounge, waited outside, saw me depart with Marcia, followed us to her place. Now unless you can come up with an ironclad alibi about where you were at the times of death. . ."

Shayne let it hang. Burns tried to say something, but no sound came from him.

Shayne kept the pressure on: "Motive. You were the real power behind Jody Parkinson, Everyone, including yourself, says so. But she is high pay and you are low pay, in comparison. Still, you've stuck with her. Why? Loyalty—or perhaps a little blackmail on her part? Was she holding your prison record over you? That really doesn't seem to make too strong a blackmail case since your prison time is public record, so maybe it's something else. What did she have on you, Harvey?"

Burns shuffled, pounded clenched fists against his thighs, but he still couldn't seem to get words out. Shayne relentlessly went on: "You knew Tanner, a regular at Jacks Club. That's probably what gave you the idea to use a tranquilizer gun. But it was just one more nail in your coffin. Too many things pointed to home base, to Jody's friends and associates. Especially to you."

Shayne paused a moment. "Okay, I'm going to give you the clincher, pal. Tonight. It's raining outside. Now someone who comes in out of the rain, and especially off a dirty street, can leave footprints. You know, like on carpeting or bath tile or—"

"Oh, God," Harvey Burns groaned. His knees buckled suddenly and he sat down hard on a couch, flopped back. He lay sprawled with his eyes closed, a forearm on his forehead.

Then the little man swung up into a sitting position suddenly. He stood, seemed abruptly revitalized.

He said, "All right, Shayne, if you care to examine shoe heels. . ."

He took the redheaded detective into a tiny bedroom where he swung open a closet door to shoes that formed a neat line on the floor. But Harvey Burns reached up on a shelf and brought down a gun. He whirled. Shayne caught him coming around, grabbed the gun wrist and snapped the weapon from his fingers. Then he spun Harvey across the room and slammed him down

on a bed. Burns bounced once and then went limp again.

"Let's go, Burns," Shayne said.

"Okay," he said finally, "but let me get it organized."

Burns sat silent for a long time before saying, "You're correct, of course. I was the power behind Jody Parkinson. But I had no design to replace her, not as Barry Lane does. All I wanted was more money, a higher salary. I felt I was worth more. And you are correct, Shayne, about the blackmail. I would have left her a long time ago if it had been possible. But there was a girl, a young girl. Later, I realized Jody had paid the girl to entice me, but I couldn't prove it, nor could I find the girl. But Jody could produce her, or one like her—and I didn't want to go back to prison. I became a puppet. Can you understand? A puppet!"

He paused and Shayne put in: "Rape was blackmail?"

Burns shrugged. "Perhaps it was rape, perhaps not. It would be a borderline case, I think. But the point is, the girl was young, we were together in a motel room and. . .well, I have this problem. Most of the time I'm in control, but young girls can trigger me."

Shayne felt a wave of personal disgust. He pressed on, anyway. "Okay, Jody Parkinson held a club over your head," Shayne said. "And you finally tired of it. But why me, Burns? Where do I fit?"

Burns looked up. He was ashen. "Would you believe I took your name from a phone book? But I got the wrong man, didn't I?"

"And you also hired Nancy Faulkner."

"Yes," Burns nodded.

"Killed Nancy Faulkner," Shayne went on.

"She could identify me, she. . ."

"Raped her?" Shayne spit the words out.

The little man licked his lips. "No. No. Just made it look like rape to confuse the police. After all, I didn't know anything about you then, Shayne—and private detectives can rape and kill like. . .like anyone else."

"It seems like a helluva lot of play to get my fingerprints on a glass, Harvey. You took a lot of chances."

Burns said nothing. Shayne waited, then said:

"You went up to Jody's place last evening on some pretext or another, and she confided in you about the extortion note she had received, the meeting she had set up with me."

"No." Burns shook his head. "I had your secretary pointed out to me several days ago.

Yesterday afternoon, Nancy and I waited outside your office, followed her home, then I had Nancy call her, ask for an evening appointment with you. You were busy. That told me what I wanted to know."

"Barbara Johnson."

"I believe that is the name Nancy used, yes."

"And then?"

"Nancy and I drove to Jody's place. I left Nancy in the car, went upstairs, had a drink with Jody, killed her, took the glass. Nancy didn't know about the killing. There was no reason for her to know, but later, of course, after the news of Jody's death became public, she could have put two and two together, so I had to kill her too."

"You went from Jody Parkinson's place to the Oyster Club, waited for me to arrive."

Burns nodded. "You and Nancy were easy, Shayne. Killing Jody. . .well, that was something else, even with all of the hate I had built up inside me. But afterward, surprisingly, I almost felt exhilarated. Free. I can't explain it. All I know is, killing Nancy was no task at all."

Shayne's disgust deepened. "What about Marcia French tonight?"

Burns took a moment before he said, "That was panic, Shayne. You frightened me. It began last night when you walked into Jody's apartment after I'd left you in a parking lot. I had thought I'd never see you again. I had thought you'd wake up, go home, get up today, read the papers about Jody's death, be visited by the police, then become frightened and leave town. Fast.

"But you came to Jody's apartment, and you seemed to be on extremely good terms with the police. That frightened me. Then this afternoon you came into the lounge when you should have been in jail. After all, the police had evidence you had an association with Jody Parkinson: there was the note and the glass with your fingerprints. And Nancy had been found dead in the trunk of your car. I couldn't understand why you still were free. You should have been in jail."

"I left the Jacks Building with Marcia French. Is that the only reason you killed her, Burns?" Shayne said with scorn.

"I noticed at Jacks that she was taken by you. Barry left —after you slugged him. Then I departed. That left you in the lounge with Marcia. I thought you might confide in her, tell her what had been happening to you with the police. I went to her place, saw you bring her home. Then I went up to her

apartment. She was going out for the evening, but she was willing to talk about you. She bathed, I sat in the front room. We talked in shouts, more or less. She was curious about my interest in you.

"Anyway, I finally realized I might really tie you to the deaths if people remembered that you and Marcia had left Jacks together. So I killed her. But it was mostly panic, Shayne, sheer panic. Everything was catching up with me, piling up. Sitting here now, listening to myself, I realize I did not have to kill Marcia. I wish I hadn't."

Shayne still remembered Marcia French's light kiss on the cheek. "Let's go," he said roughly.

"What. . .what are you going to do?" Burns asked, worried.

"Me? Nothing. I let police handle scum like you. They get paid for it."

In the APRIL Issue:

. . . TO ALL MY HEIRS, DEATH

The Action Packed New Mike Shayne Complete Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Death had brought his heirs together, and death was dogging their footsteps, even as Harry Elder lay dying. Heirs that he had never met: heirs who had never met each other before. Heirs to whom his death meant terror, terror which stalked them in the dark Florida nights! Then one of Harry Elder's heirs took things into her own hands. She approached Michael Shayne for protection. But even as she hurried to make an appointment with the redheaded detective, Death sped before her. Tires screeching, rubber burning, a car nearly hit Shayne. Only his trigger-quick reactions saved his life — and left him vulnerable in Miami's murky watered bay!

"BAIT FOR A KILLER"

Together, the porcelain figures were invaluable. Carefully, Mei Wong stepped on one, smashing it.

THE TENSE silence of the big room was broken only by the hum of a ceiling fan. There were three people gathered in the teak-panelled office of the Bombay Art and Curio Company. They had come there to sort out the facts of a brutal murder and at the moment they had arrived at a dead end which left them in this frustrated silence.

Tall Inspector Bannerjee of the Bombay Homicide Division stood at a window of the room staring out across the distant bay with a grim expression on his thin, bronzed face with its black, pointed beard.

Stout, elderly Mei Wong sat back placidly in a chair behind the broad mahogany desk which was the most impressive piece of furniture in the office. His gaze was fixed on a delicate, porcelain figure of a Seventeenth-Century woman of the Kang Hsi period, finished in a soft, yet vivid green.

In a chair beside his desk sat

a MR. MEI WONG story by DAN ROSS

attractive, blonde Ann Trent. She was also staring at the figure with a look of awe mixed with fear. Her hands in her lap twisted nervously.

Inspector Bannerjee broke the silence by turning to them and saying in his clipped, British accent, "Of course we know that Stephen Claridge murdered Ann's father! The point is, how will we be able to prove it!"

The mention of Stephen Claridge caused a frown to appear on Mei Wong's broad face. He said, "I know Claridge to be a ruthless man in many ways. That is surely how he has built his International holdings to become the multi-millionaire of our time. And I have dealt with him enough to be aware that he is a madly, greedy collector of art objects. But whether he would personally commit a murder is something I question."

Ann Trent gave the old art dealer a despairing glance. "I'm sure he killed my father, Mr. Wong! No one else visited the house that night. Father saw Stephen Claridge in mid-evening. No one else came to the house afterward. And when I went to say goodnight to my father I found him dead. His head battered by a pair of brass tongs. The room had been ransacked and one of the figures of Kang Hsi was gone. The male figure which matches this one!"

Mei Wong sighed. "I realize the value of the matched figures of Kang Hsi only too well," he said. "There aren't more than three or four sets in existence today. One in the British Museum, one in a Washington museum, the other in the hands of a wealthy Turkish collector and this set which was owned by your father."

Inspector Bannerjee took a step nearer Mei Wong's desk as he explained, "Claridge thought he would get away with both the male and female figures since Ann's father had the male figure on his desk during their interview. What he did not know was that the female figure was safely locked away in a vault in a downstairs room. After he killed Ann's father he ransacked the place and found nothing. He was forced to leave with only the male figure."

Ann Trent said, "As you know, from a collector's viewpoint a single figure is of small value. One must have the two matched figures."

Inspector Bannerjee said, "There were no fingerprints. Nothing to link Stephen Claridge with the murder, except that he had been to visit Ann's father that night. We can't even prove that he has

the male figure. You can depend that he has carefully hidden it away."

Mei Wong nodded. "That would be what one would expect," he said in his soft voice. "But if he were so anxious to get the matched figures of Kang Hsi surely he would have made an offer for them by this time."

An angry look crossed Ann Trent's lovely face as she said scornfully, "He has done that! Through an agent, he offered to buy both figures at a fantastic price or one for a relatively paltry sum. Of course he knows I have only the female figure since he took the male one with him after he murdered my father!"

"As the Inspector pointed out," Mei Wong said, "I fear that would be extremely hard to prove."

Inspector Bannerjee turned to the girl. "I can't allow you to hope too much. Mei Wong is right. We have had to fall back on the old theory that some unknown intruder bent on robbery came to your home that night after Claridge left. And it was he who murdered your father and committed the robbery."

"That has to be wrong!" she protested. "I know that Stephen Claridge is guilty. The figures had become an insane obsession with him. My father told me that before his murder."

The Inspector's bronzed, bearded face wore an expression of grim resignation as he told her, "I've done all I can. Perhaps my friend, Mei Wong, can think of something."

The girl turned to the old art dealer. "Please try! You're my last hope Mr. Wong. That is why I brought the female figure here to you. Claridge wants it desperately and he returns to Bombay this week."

Mei Wong sat studying the delicate porcelain figure of the princess. He looked like a preoccupied Buddha in an immaculate white linen suit. At last, he said, "Claridge is a difficult man to deal with. He prefers to use agents. And even when I have met him and dealt with him on a personal level it has invariably been unpleasant."

"Isn't there any way you can prove his guilt?" the girl asked despairingly.

"The police have failed," the old art dealer reminded her. "I must have time to think about this. If you will agree to leave the princess with me I'll try and make an appointment with Stephen Claridge when he returns to Bombay."

Inspector Bannerjee gave the art dealer a warning look. "You could be placing yourself in

danger, Wong. If he knows you have this figure he's not above having you murdered to get it."

"I understand that," Mei Wong said quietly. "When I have made my appointment with him I will let you know."

Ann Trent stood up. "You can have the figure," she said. "I make you a gift of it. I only want to see my father's killer brought to justice."

Mei Wong was on his feet and he smiled bleakly. "I would not accept your generous offer. But it will help me if I keep the figure here until I see Claridge. If indeed, he will agree to visit me."

THREE DAYS LATER the old art dealer contacted the eccentric millionaire, Stephen Claridge, at his hotel suite and was able to arrange a meeting with him that night without too much difficulty. As soon as Claridge learned that Mei Wong had the female figure of Kang Hsi he was almost eager to see him and make him an offer for it.

"I'm only the agent for Miss Trent," Mei Wong warned him. "The price of the figure will be high."

"We'll discuss that when we meet," Stephen Claridge said with his usual harsh abruptness. "And may I say our meeting must be held in absolute privacy. Is that understood? No one but ourselves are to be present. You know the high value I place on privacy."

"I understand," Mei Wong said.

"I will enter your building by the back entrance and make my way up the stairs," Claridge went on. "My driver will wait for me until our interview is over."

So it was arranged with all the adherence to privacy for which Stephen Claridge was so noted. There were few people in the world who could even recognize the famed millionaire, so feverishly had he pursued his desire for anonymity. No wonder, Mei Wong thought wryly, if Claridge occasionally used this anonymity to indulge in murder.

It was nine in the evening when the expected knock came on the entrance door to Mei Wong's studio. The old art dealer stood there amid the splendor of the room's art treasures, his stout, white-clad figure outlined against the scarlet and green tapestries, the showcases filled with antiques and the many colorful treasures in enamel and brass.

He moved slowly to the door and unlocked it. As he opened it the imposing figure of Stephen Claridge stood revealed in the shadowed corridor outside. The gray-haired,

hawk-faced man gave him an uneasy look.

"Are you alone?" he demanded.

"Yes. My last customer left an hour ago. I have been waiting for you," the old art dealer said. "Please come in."

Stephen Claridge entered the studio and glanced around him. "You have an interesting place here. Must be three years since I last visited you."

"Closer to four," Mei Wong said as he closed the door and joined the millionaire.

Claridge at once plunged into the reason for his visit. "I'm in a hurry," he said. "My time is valuable. You say you have the female figure of Kang Hsi?"

"Yes. Miss Trent has asked me to sell it."

The hawk face showed a greedy expression. "You know it isn't worth much as a single piece. Now if you had the pair to offer it would be another story."

Mei Wong eyed him directly. "You must have heard that the male figure was stolen by the killer of Miss Trent's father."

Stephen Claridge raised his eyebrows. "Really? I must have missed that."

"Your agent made an offer for the piece," Mei Wong said calmly. "You must have known."

The millionaire's hawk face

showed uneasiness. "My agent may have known without telling me. Let me see the piece." He could not hide his greedy, impatience.

"Of course," Mei Wong said. And he went over to a glassed in shelf and carefully unlocked the covering and slid it back. Then he took out a chamois bag and, turning, placed it on the counter. He opened the bag and with hands surprisingly small in a man of his bulk delicately withdrew the figure from the bag. He set it on the glass counter in all its porcelain loveliness.

A smile crossed the hawk face of Stephen Claridge. "Exquisite!" he murmured.

"It can be yours," Mei Wong said watching him closely. And he named a suitable, high price.

Claridge reacted to the quoted price angrily. He said, "That's utter nonsense! The Trent girl should be glad to take a quarter of that!"

Mei Wong kept a hand on the figure as he said, "You will offer no more than that?"

The millionaire smiled grimly. "I can wait until she's ready to sell at my price."

The old art dealer said, "Perhaps you can. Perhaps you have the male partner to this already?"

Claridge's hawk face showed anger. "What does that mean?"

"Just what I say," Mei Wong said calmly. "Trent was a good friend of mine as well as a customer. Rather than see his daughter robbed of her rights I'll purchase the figure myself and do with it what I please!"

"You're bluffing!" the millionaire said with scorn.

"You think so?" Mei Wong said calmly. And with that he lifted the delicately-fashioned porcelain figure from the counter and threw it onto the tiled floor of the studio. The dainty piece splintered into bits!

"You old fool!" Claridge screamed in a rage.

Mei Wong crumbled the remaining bits of the figure with his heel. "I can well afford this pleasure," he said.

Claridge had backed away. He stared at the ruins of the priceless porcelain figure on the floor and then he lifted his eyes to fix on Mei Wong with venomous hatred.

"You have gone too far!" he said in a taut voice. "No one crosses me this way!"

Mei Wong smiled. "There are some things which are even beyond you!"

Claridge whipped out a tiny revolver and pointed it at him. He said, "I killed Trent for the male figure and now I'll kill you for robbing me of the pair!"

There was a rasping sob in his voice.

But the revolver was never fired. At that moment Inspector Bannerjee and three of his men came bursting out of the inner office to surprise a bewildered Stephen Claridge.

It was the following afternoon when Inspector Bannerjee, Ann Trent and Mei Wong met in the office of his studio again. By that time Stephen Claridge had spent his first night in a prison cell and had been charged with the murder of Ann Trent's father on the basis of his own admission.

Ann Trent stood with Inspector Bannerjee before Mei Wong's desk and said, "I will forever be grateful to you, Mr. Wong."

The old man seated at the desk spread his small hands. "Stephen Claridge had come to that point in his rascality when he had to betray himself. I was only an instrument in bringing it about."

Inspector Bannerjee nodded grimly. "I agree. And by the way, we've found the male figure which he stole from Ann's father. It is unfortunate you had to destroy the female one to obtain his confession, but I suppose it was worth it."

Ann Trent nodded. "I told Mr. Wong I didn't care about the figures even though they would be worth a fortune."

At his desk Mei Wong smiled slyly. Then he said, "That is too bad. You see the figure which Claridge saw me smash last night was a clever replica created by an artisan in my employ. It served well enough as I gave Claridge no time to examine it closely." He bent down and opened a drawer of his desk and brought out the lovely porcelain figure of the princess and set it out on the desk before them so that the sun caught its green loveliness.

Ann Trent gasped. "It is the real figure!"

Mei Wong nodded. "My gift to you. Now you have a matched pair again."

FOR FASTER SERVICE—USE ZIP CODE NUMBERS! REMEMBER, ZIP NUMBERS ARE PART OF YOUR ADDRESS!
BE SURE TO AVOID LAST MINUTE RUSH!
MAIL EARLY IN THE DAY!
IT'S FASTER THAT WAY!

MY FRIEND, STRADIVARIUS

They went off into the darkness, the kindly old lady who was going to kill me and a visitor she didn't know about—my furry little secret weapon called oblivion!

by JERRY JACOBSON

IN HIS highly inhabited, immaculately clean dormitory room in the Lake Serene Sanitarium, eleven-year-old Kevin Petty sat cross-legged and very still in the middle of the tile floor. Across his small world he had the blinds drawn against the late-morning sun and it fought to find slits of space through which to stream any slender beam. In addition to the artifical darkness Kevin Petty also had all his windows closed against the sharp, near-zero November air.

Both were important prerequisites to draw his pet insect, Stradivarius, out of hiding and out into the open spaces of the room where it could be recaptured. And on this special day, on this particularly vital special day, it was imperative that Stradivarius be re-captured.

Across the room, from fish bowls and glass cages and one large fish tank of steel, the

room's silence magnified the stirrings and movement of minute life. House spiders, lady bugs, beetles, cockroaches, termites, ants and an assortment of moths and butterflies, all were seized by restlessness. In concert it was the sound of a woman's skirt rustling, the fresh, starchy sound Kevin Petty could dimly recall of his mother's own skirt when she moved about in the kitchen so many years in his past.

His mother was dead now, had been for five years, as was Kevin's father and older brother, all killed in a train accident in which Kevin and only five other passengers in a trainload of 345 had been spared.

All Kevin could remember of it was scrambling to the floor of their car for a piece of candy he'd dropped just as the trains impacted. It saved his life.

Kevin's sharp eyes watched the tile floor around him alertly. He also watched the dead earwig placed as bait to lure Stradivarius out of hiding. For three days Kevin had denied Stradivarius his meals, his plan forming in his mind.

Three days was a long time for Stradivarius to go without eating. When Kevin had placed him in the water glass to clean his fish bowl, Stradivarius' cannibalistic cravings grew to such overwhelming proportions that he'd managed by some miraculous acrobatic acumen to climb up the slippery inside of the drinking glass and escape into the square tile jungle of Kevin Petty's room.

He had been at large now over two hours, but Kevin was hopeful, even confident. The earwig's dead flesh would send its putrid aroma into every crevice and crack drawing Stradivarius to the center of the room to feast in the vulnerable clearing of bare tile floor.

To re-capture him, Kevin had ready a small piece of nylon cloth soaked in a watered solution of benzyl thiocyanate, an insecticide he'd mixed.

His father's genes had given him a rare genius for entomology and basic chemistry. His father, before his death, had been a renowned chemist himself and the inventor of a host of electronic devices, one of which had been a transducer to regulate the air pressure in commercial aircraft. The invention of the transducer alone had made him a rich man at thirty.

As he continued his breathless vigil there came a prefunctory knock at his door, followed by the sound of it opening behind him. A light rush of cool air raced up Kevin Petty's neck and he knew instantly that Stradivarius, too, would feel the

chill on him and retreat to the warmth of his present hiding place.

"Kevin? It will be lunch time shortly. And here I find you sitting in the middle of the floor in your underclothes. You know your Aunt Tula likes to see her favorite nephew in his best suit and necktie when she pays him a Saturday visit."

Miss Bender knelt beside him and with a soft touch brushed tails of blonde hair out of Kevin's eyes.

Miss Bender was a floor coordinator at Lake Serene Sanitarium. All the floor coordinators were trained nurses who wore crisp, antiseptic, white nurse uniforms and little peaked caps, but they were not called nurses because Lake Serene was not truly a hospital, but a place where people of all ages came for rest cures and relaxation and relief from the tensions and strains of life.

Kevin was aware that some of them were crazy and others of them were very unbalanced, but he never admitted knowing it to anyone. Children at Lake Serene were not supposed to know these things and Kevin didn't want to start a big fuss over something that was, for some odd reason, supposed to be kept a deep, dark secret from the children.

"What ever are you doing down on the floor, Kevin? You'll catch your death from the cold tile and then Dr. Railsforde will become very angry with me for having neglected one of his favorite residents."

She helped him up from the floor. Miss Bender had a glowing, oval Scandinavian face that always smelled like lavender soap.

She had always been good to him at Lake Serene. They went together on walks and bicycle rides and field trips and picnics on the grounds of the sanitarium. It was Miss Bender who had convinced Dr. Railsforde of the importance of the young boys at Lake Serene having hobbies, who in turn along with Miss Bender's help had assembled Kevin's entomological apparatus and had helped him acquire his chemicals and text books.

He loved them both nearly as much as he had loved his parents and his brother Andre. He confided nearly everything to them. Except in the beginning, when he had first arrived at Lake Serene and had pretended to be insane, trying to fool them in his psychological tests and by misinterpreting his ink blots.

Kevin never would have resorted to all this initially deceptive behavior had it not been for his Aunt Tula and the pos-

sibility that he would have to return and live with her. It was his Aunt Tula who had murdered Uncle Randolph and had made it appear an accident. And it was his Aunt Tula who was now carefully planning to have Kevin returned to her so that she could murder Kevin in some similar "accidental" fashion, thereby getting all of father's money and the income from his inventions and ideas. Kevin had talked many times with Dr. Railsforde about these matters and even though Dr. Railsforde had been patient and logical in explaining how impossible such evil motives were, Kevin still knew Aunt Tula wanted to kill Kevin.

As his mother's sister, Aunt Tula knew very well she stood to become very wealthy should Kevin be taken from the safety of Lake Serene and then become the victim of some well-planned accident without witnesses. That was the way his Uncle Randolph had died. After a long, carefully-conceived plan. Without witnesses.

There was one other matter about which Kevin had not been completely honest and that was the matter of the existence of Stradivarius, whom Kevin had found nesting beneath a pile of lumber near the loading dock which serviced the kitchen, the previous summer.

Kevin had kept Stradivarius alive all summer and now into November, all along thinking him to be just another ordinary specimen to identify and wonder over and watch as he proceeded with the business of his life in Kevin's fishbowl. No one but Kevin knew of Stradivarius. And now, his usefulness could not be employed because he was lost. And if he could not be found before one o'clock, when Aunt Tula had signed the papers and returned by car to her home sixty miles north of Lake Serene Sanitarium, she would be back in the morning to assume custody of Kevin for good. And then, there was no telling just how long he would have to live.

Miss Bender now led him into the small bathroom, where she helped him remove his T-shirt and presented him with a wash cloth.

"Remember, Kevin," she told him firmly, as she filled the basin with hot water, "all the children of God's Kingdom are honest, industrious, kind and clean, even behind the ears."

"Yes, Miss Bender."

In the mirror above the sink, Kevin saw her face become mildly perplexed. "Kevin? Were you down on the floor because you had lost something? Were you searching for something? A button, or a sock, or a shoe?"

And then her perplexion turned to mild horror. "Good Lord, you weren't searching for one of those little insects of yours, I hope! If you were, and Dr. Railsforde learned of it, I'm afraid that would be the end of your strange, etomological hobby, cages, critters and all. . ."

"It's *ento*-mology, Miss Bender," said Kevin as he began a dutiful scrubbing of his ears. "And besides, even if I *had* lost an ant or a beetle someplace, I'm leaving with my Aunt Tula tomorrow anyway, so there wouldn't be anything Dr. Railsforde could do to punish me."

"Nevertheless, young man, you haven't let one of your insects loose in your nice, clean room, have you Kevin?"

"No, Miss Bender, I haven't," Kevin Petty lied with a straight, honest expression as he felt a hand direct the washcloth somewhat rudely to a spot behind his left ear.

"My, how perfectly like a grown young man you look, Kevin!" said his Aunt Tula as she wrapped him in a smothering hug twenty minutes later outside the cafeteria. Next to her fat cheek, Kevin squinted his eyes shut tightly and tried not to breathe in the appetite-spoiling odors of sweet perfume and face powder. After the hug had been endured she examined him at arm's length, with Dr.

Railsforde and Miss Bender doing the same at either of her thick shoulders.

"A nice white shirt, and your hair combed just like a little soldier. I'd be willing to bet my young nephew even washed behind his ears without being told to do so!"

Kevin stared back at Aunt Tula blankly, wondering if Stradivarius had come out of hiding to consume the earwig. Miss Bender had opened the blinds and the window.

"Well," Kevin responded now (because they all seemed to be expecting some sort of proper response), "no one *told me* to wash behind my ears, but I do recall receiving some assistance and direction in that regard."

"My, my, my," his Aunt Tula chuckled, somewhat uneasily, "such grown-up language for a young boy! One would almost think you ate dictionaries for lunch instead of the fine, well-balanced meals served here at Lake Serene."

Both Miss Bender and Dr. Railsforde chuckled uncomfortably. "Which leads me quite naturally to the menu for this afternoon, Kevin. What are you and your favorite auntie having for lunch?"

"Salisbury steak, Aunt Tula."

"So special, just for a visitor's day!"

Kevin smiled at her tolerantly. "We always have Salisbury steak on Visitors' Saturday. It is served mainly to impress the visitors with the high level of care given the patients. In point of culinary fact, the meals served here at Lake Serene on regular occasions rank somewhat below today's for quality and nutrition."

Boy, no one in their small gathering cared for that at all. Miss Bender's eyes went closed lightly, Dr. Railsforde's black eyebrows rose sharply and Aunt Tula seemed to be having some little trouble getting her mouth closed.

"Well, I'm sure they bend every effort—" his Aunt Tula began, her voice trailing off into a nasal stream of foolish chatter, which continued through the cafeteria line as she filled every inch of tray space with a dish or a bowl.

"My, but those onion rings look lovely," and when his Aunt Tula speared a generous number with her fork, Kevin said nothing about the indiscriminate gluttony which had already caused her three heart attacks in the past year. At their small table Aunt Tula wasted no time reducing her noontime selection to mere dishware, while she riddled Kevin with questions about Lake Serene and the state of her nephew's well-being.

"Your Aunt Tula's little spice shop is now open for business in the square in Brentwood," she said, between chews and swallows and touches to her chest with her fist to stave off early heartburn. "I've called it The Compleat Cookery, Kevin and besides the spices, I've stocked 16 kinds of coffee beans, all the tea under the sun, plus utensils and cookbooks. I've even had the plaster torn from the walls to reveal the quaint, original brick of that old building. . ."

Kevin kept a steady stream of interested smiles radiating out to her from across the table. He knew where the

money had come from for her spice shop. A modest provision in his father's will left her and Uncle Randolph $10,000.

His uncle had been something of an inventor and tinkerer, though seemingly always just an invention and a tinker behind original discovery. It was this ineffective perpetual motion that had *supposedly* caused his own death, *supposedly* by his own hand, early one morning in his basement laboratory.

Initially, there was some question whether the incident had happened precisely as Aunt Tula had described it, since an examination of the death pistol produced a stray fingerprint belonging to Aunt Tula. With a grief shattered heart she explained that she had broken in on her husband in his workshop just as he was withdrawing the pistol from a desk drawer and had struggled with him in vain to wrench the weapon from his grasp.

Later, no amount of interrogation at the coroner's inquest could dissuade or trick Aunt Tula from her original statements.

Kevin listened attentively to Aunt Tula's glowing reports of the success of her spice shop, keeping up a chatter of seemingly innocuous questions on everything under the sun, to

show his was a child's mind, a harmless scattergun of a thing not to be taken too seriously.

His stream of inquiry, however, wasn't intended to be so harmless and fractured. Kevin Petty had a key question in the back of his mind and he kept it harbored there until the right moment came for its introduction. And when that proper moment arose, Kevin Petty portrayed his question as idle conversation by speaking it with a mouth filled with mashed potatoes.

"Aunt Tula, did Uncle Randolph have life insurance?"

In precise concert with the question, a bit of food seemed to catch itself going down Aunt Tula's throat which, because of its constant interaction with food, made Kevin think of a chugging, sucking kitchen garbage disposal.

"Life insurance, Kevin dear?

Why, whatever popped a question such as that into your mind?"

Kevin's question was a two-parter, actually; a spring-board to a more pointed issue.

"Oh, yes," he apologized now, looking sheepish, "I guess insurance companies don't reward the beneficiary in the case of suicide. I'll have to look that up. Or maybe write a letter to the state insurance commissioner. I'm funny that way, Aunt Tula. If I don't know the answer to something, I'll ask everyone's head off, or write letters all over the place until my curiosity is satisfied. My father always said that the spirit of inquiry was itself a separate set of corpuscles coursing through the Petty bloodstream."

Kevin could almost visualize Aunt Tula, as she visualized Kevin dropping his letter to the state insurance commissioner into a mailbox, a suspicious event she likely wanted to eliminate because she said to Kevin now, laughing a bit nervously over her peach cobbler, "Well, Kevin, there is really no need to waste the state insurance commissioner's valuable time with questions your Aunt Tula can answer. Yes, in the case of some insurance policies, suicide-clauses are sometimes written into the contracts.

"These are very special cases, of course, instances involving highly temperamental people of unique and valuable genius or talent. You see, dearest Kevin, the loss of these people and their unique talents often means a loss to those around them. Their managers, their producers, their financial backers. . ."

"Like concert violinists," said Kevin brightly. "And prima ballerinas, and home run hitters, and brilliant scientific minds." He paused for effect. "And inventors."

"Yes, inventors, Kevin. Like your own father. And like your Uncle Randolph. While your father did not add such a clause to his own life insurance policy, he was considered by many, more emotionally stable than your Uncle Randolph, less exhibitive of suicidal tendencies, shall I say?"

For reasons well known by Kevin, to which he was careful not to allude now. In pure point of scientific fact, Uncle Randolph hadn't completely or successfully invented anything in his entire lifetime.

"Well it seems to me," Kevin said now, trying to appear somewhat dense about the whole matter of insurance "that insurance companies wouldn't be so foolish as to write an insurance policy on someone

who just might turn around and kill himself before the ink was even dry on the policy."

"Insurance companies aren't so foolish, Kevin-pet," said Aunt Tula as a fresh forkload of peach cobbler disappeared inside her mouth. "In such policies, there is what is called a contested period."

"A contested period?"

"Yes, Kevin. For a period of from one to three years, the insured is scrutinized continually by the insurance company for any indications of latent suicidal tendencies. If during that period, the company judges the insured to be a poor risk, the clause is cancelled. Do you understand all that, Kevin?"

"I—I think so, Aunt Tula. For you to know so much about it, Uncle Randolph's life insurance policy must have had some kind of clause like that in it."

Aunt Tula brought her napkin to her chin to stifle a cough. "Yes, Kevin. As a matter of fact it did. It was only reasonable to include such a clause. Your Uncle Randolph knew the stresses and strains of the inventor's life, as did your own father and he was a much more temperamental sort as well. Fortunately, the contested-period passed and it was finally judged by the insurance company that your Uncle Randolph was not excessively prone to suicide."

"And then he went and shot himself," said Kevin, "proving once again, pertaining to knowing others, the truth which Thomas Fuller spoke when he said, 'Everyone thinks he knows much'."

"Thomas Fuller, yes," said his Aunt Tula vaguely. "Well, Kevin, I wouldn't take too swiftly the advice of your fellow residents here at Lake Serene. A good number of them are a little off-center, mentally. But you, Kevin, anyone would know you like a book. You are a kind, gentle young man who wouldn't harm a fly. Your tender love of the creatures of the insect world proves that. And once we have you settled out at my place in Brentwood, you'll be able to collect and examine and experiment with your little friends to your heart's content, right there in your Uncle Randolph's own basement workshop and laboratory. And you'll like Brentwood Middle School. I'm sure it has a fine science program and fine teachers and you'll make many new friends."

"Yes, Aunt Tula, I'm sure I'll like it out in Brentwood just fine," Kevin said and no more, but excused himself and went through the cafeteria line to get Aunt Tula a second helping of

peach cobbler and whipping cream, slightly frightened, wondering where in the world he was going to find a friend to believe his Aunt Tula meant to kill him at her very earliest convenience.

She was a greedy woman.

He knew her gluttony wasn't confined strictly to things she could put in her stomach. His Aunt Tula wanted things she could wrap around her fat frame—furs and fine dresses and expensive jewelry, and things she could drive, and things she could have around her, one of everything in the world if his Aunt Tula had her way.

And her way was through Kevin, through his elimination. Kevin was aware of the stipulation of his father's Will. Since he and his Aunt Tula were now the only remaining heirs, everything of his father's was bequeathed to Kevin, held in trust for him until he reached his eighteenth birthday. If he should die before then, his father's invention patents, his savings, his stock, everything, would all accrue to Aunt Tula. *If he should die!* There was nothing iffy about it! When he died!

In the hallway outside the cafeteria, Kevin Petty tried to pretend the rotund woman standing next to him and making no attempt to camouflage her stomach belches was a complete stranger.

"Well, I must admit that was a meal befitting royalty," Aunt Tula said expansively. "I'm going to truly miss this quiet, pleasant retreat. Our walks in the lovely gardens. Our nice lunches here in the cafeteria together. As I am sure you will miss it all, the many pleasant experiences and all the fine friends you've made during your stay here at Lake Serene."

His friends, thought Kevin, as he tried not to notice Aunt Tula as she scratched and patted her satisfied, bulbous stomach. He could count them all on one finger: Miss Bender. And he had thought Dr. Railsforde was his friend, as well; thought he would understand the real, deadly reasons behind his pretended insanity, his desperation to twist and fashion his psychological tests into the products of a deranged and shattered mind. How could Dr. Railsforde *possibly* ignore the fact that Aunt Tula wanted custody of Kevin only to kill him? Why hadn't he contacted the police, as Kevin had pleaded he do? Why was he refusing to listen to reason? Why would a professional, logical, reasonable man turn his back on pure fact?

"Kevin," his Aunt Tula was saying down to him now, "your Aunt Tula must step into Dr.

Railsforde's office now. There are ever so many papers your auntie must sign pertaining to the transfer of your custody. Why don't you run along up to your room and begin getting your things together so you'll be all packed when your Aunt Tula returns for you tomorrow? I'll kiss you goodbye here, sweet child. . ."

This abrupt departure from her normal routine threw Kevin into momentary shock. On every other Visitors' Saturday they had capped off lunch with a visit to his room where Kevin would show Aunt Tula his latest specimens, or a new embalming process, or some minor breakthrough he'd made in cross-breeding. And now, on this the most vital of all their Saturdays, she was about to absent herself from the very place where his only hope for mortal salvation could take place. He checked his shock and tried to keep from his voice any suspicious pleading or ulterior urging.

"But, Aunt Tula, you always come to my room on Visitors' Saturday to see my latest projects. I've embalmed a new fence lizard I found out near the volleyball court. And I am attempting to cross-breed a species of mantis to see if their parasitic nature can be reduced."

Aunt Tula's usually florid face began to show signs of growing an even deeper red. "Oh, Kevin-pet, you know how those icky bugs of yours give me goose-bumps and send my heart racing out of control. Your Aunt Tula must be very careful, about excitement and her heart, as you well know, Kevin."

". . .if I can make some successful cross-breeds," Kevin went on, with feigned enthusiasm, because he had no such *Mantispidae* involved in any cross-breeding experiments, "then the terrible toll the mantispids take of wasps and bees may be reduced to the gratitude of all of nature and the endangered natural processes of flora fertilization. . ."

"Oh, very well, Kevin," said Aunt Tula finally, after Kevin had managed to squeeze out a few tears, "you go upstairs and tidy your room and get your experiments in order and your auntie will be up in a little while. After she has her talk with Dr. Railsforde and signs the custody papers."

As Kevin watched her undulate away from him down the hallway, he breathed a deep sigh of relief. In his enthusiasm to get Aunt Tula upstairs, he had completely forgotten that Stradivarius was still missing. And without Stradivarius he

had no plan and then what would be the use of bringing Aunt Tula up to his room?

Now that he thought of it, he could even use a little extra time. Miss Bender had opened his window, so the room would have to be reheated before Stradivarius would venture away from the warmth of the baseboard heating unit and into the center of the room. It was to this purpose that Kevin now followed after Aunt Tula, going through the frosted door marked DR. RAILSFORDE-RESIDENT PHYSICIAN, beyond which was the receptionist's anteroom which was empty, indicating Miss Colltrane was still at lunch.

His intention was to knock on Dr. Railsforde's door and after being admitted to his inner office and apologizing for the interruption, suggest to Aunt Tula that she give him a little extra time to prepare what he had to show her in his room. He desperately needed to buy a few extra minutes with which to lure Stradivarius out into the open.

But he didn't knock. His small fist was stopped short of rapping by the voices coming to him through the open transom above his head. Dr. Railsforde was speaking. And he wasn't mincing any words.

"...and now your copy of the letter I instructed be written to protect us both..."

"...and *your* copy of the letter implicating *you* in the same crime," said his Aunt Tula in a tone equally as wary. "I confess I don't much care for confessing to the murder of my husband, but as long as I have your signed testimony confessing your part in the murder of my nephew, I really haven't anything to complain about."

"Nothing at all," Dr. Railsforde assured Aunt Tula. "You knew when I contacted you about this lucrative possibility four years ago that there would be certain risks. But a quarter of a million dollars is worth some risk and now, with these letters mutually implicating ourselves, we've reduced the risk to nil."

"But thirty percent of a fortune that size..." said Aunt Tula.

"I thought we'd already agreed that percentage to be a fair settlement. You forget that before I came into your life, you had only your insatiable greed and your wishful dreams. I brought you my unique position and the perfect plan to drop a family fortune right down into your lap."

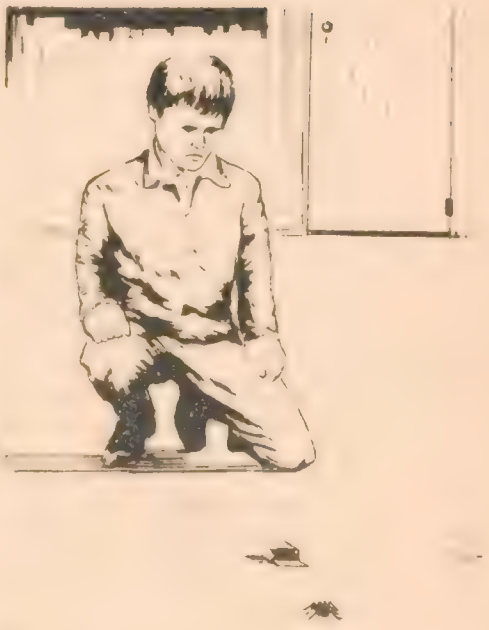
"Yes, I suppose I do have you to thank for those things."

"And now, my dear Tula, we are just a short while away from

ridding each other of the separate albatrosses clinging to our backs. You, your marginal poverty and a smart aleck of a nephew for whom you have no use. And me, this white elephant of a rest home I can assure you I've wanted to flee like a case of the plague for the past twenty years. . ."

More conversation was spoken, but Kevin Petty needed to hear no more. They were going to kill him! And what was worse, Dr. Railsforde had been in on the scheme all along! It was no longer puzzling to Kevin why he had been so skeptical about Kevin's suspicions. Far more deadly than that, they *knew* he knew. Knowledge of that sort might even hasten his death, would only serve to keep him under closer scrutiny if he was successfully transported to Brentwood. Freedom there? Movement? Schooldays at the progressive, enlightened Brentwood Middle School? Hardly. Not a chance. Once Kevin set a single foot in that house, they'd carefully see to it that he never left it again, except beneath a blanket in stilled death.

His panic under the tightest control he could muster, Kevin slipped out of the office and made his way back down the first floor hall, asking everyone he passed if Miss Bender had been seen anywhere. Someone had seen her here five minutes ago, there ten minutes ago. But just at the moment no one could say or recall for sure. And then he realized that perhaps even Miss Bender could not be trusted.



Upstairs in his room, Kevin tried to catch his breath from his four-floor scramble up the main staircase. He turned the heating dial up to 75° and closed the window and yanked open the Venetian blinds to let fresh sunlight rib the wine, tile floor. The dead earwig was still untouched and Kevin had been right that Stradivarius would think twice about venturing from the warmth and safety of a wall to feed on it.

There was so little time now and everything depended upon Stradivarius and the quickness with which the room reheated. Creatures of Stradivarius' kind were rarely found this far north on the continent and if by some miracle of adaptation they managed to survive they had the discovery of a place of warmth to thank, a sort of instinctive blind luck likely they themselves did not even understand.

Sitting cross-legged on the floor, Kevin resumed his breathless vigil, the nylon cloth soaked in the benzyl thiocyanate held ready in his hand. He counted the squares of tile, searching each one for a sign of movement as the baseboards hummed out additional warmth. Time seemed to be racing by unnaturally. If Aunt Tula came into his room now. . .

And then Kevin's eye was drawn towards a moving shadow on the floor beneath the window. He concentrated his gaze on the shadow as it crept in halting fits in the direction of the limp, reddish carcass six squares of tile beyond its line of movement.

Stradivarius! The room's heat had lent him comfort and courage. Its invisible waves had washed in its wake across the room the odor of prey recently killed and the three days' of forced starvation and his mounting hunger were now combining to force Stradivarius out into the vulnerable clearing to feast.

When Kevin Petty dropped the insecticide-soaked nylon cloth over Stradivarius, it was done with deft swiftness. For an instant the tiny lump beneath the cloth sent up shimmering, billowing waves of nylon in a frightened effort to escape the smother and smell of the lethal fumes of benzyl thiocyanate.

Stradivarius knew only the smell of this deadly liquid, did not know that in diluted amounts its administration produced only a comatose state. He needn't have worried. He was not going to die. He was merely going to sleep for a brief while.

Quickly, when the movement beneath the cloth ceased, Kevin Petty slipped a sheet of paper beneath the rigid brown body and carried it to the table across his room. He laid Stradivarius on his back and under a magnifying glass saw his small body still pulsing with the blood of life.

He had to work quickly now. He struck a match and sterilized the sewing needle, then dipped the needle's tiny tip into a spoon filled with diethyl oxide compounded with

water to make a diluted local anesthetic. Between Stradivarius' head and abdomen, he probed the insect's fleshy thorax for the slender vagus nerve. Finding it easily, for he had anesthetized dozens of insects in the past, Kevin Petty barely pressed the needle until its ashen tip disappeared for a moment. Then he withdrew it quickly and cleanly with a surgical skill that would have surprised the finest surgeons.

The operation was not done a moment too soon. Aunt Tula's familiar, forceful knock sounded at the door. Remaining calm, Kevin Petty transferred Stradivarius' sleeping body to the specially constructed ring box and secured the lid. He then went back to the center of the room for the dead earwig. He picked it up between his left index finger and thumb, making no attempt to be gentle about it.

Aunt Tula stayed only a minute, given as she was to a certain amount of fear and queasiness when it came to being in the same room with insects and reptiles of any kind. She pretended expansive interest; then smiling greenly she put out her arms to Kevin.

"Kevin, your auntie could find fascination in your little friends *simply all day long*, if she didn't have so many things to do this afternoon in preparation for your transfer to my home in Brentwood. There is your room to be fixed up, with football posters and some scientific equipment I've bought you. And groceries to buy, now that I'm going to have a healthy young man with a big appetite around the house. And *so many* other matters to attend to, as well. So come give your favorite auntie a nice big kiss and hug until tomorrow morning."

Kevin smiled at her and went into Aunt Tula's outstretched arms, putting his left hand up and around the right side of her neck as he held his breath against the nauseous aroma of her perfume.

"It's very cold out this afternoon," Kevin said to her as he watched her waddle off down the fourth floor hallway. The four-floor climb had not been kind to her heart. When he'd hugged against her bullwark-like chest he felt it pounding like an aging machine gone out of control. "Be sure and turn your car heater on when the engine warms."

"Such a thoughtful nephew to think of his auntie's comfort. See you in the morning, Kevin-angel."

From the window in his room, Kevin could see the parking lot and the circular drive leading from it and the two-lane

asphalt highway five hundred yards in the lush, green distance. He saw his Aunt Tula come from the building, the bulky, open-mouthed, shoulder bag purse swinging from her left shoulder while she kept her right hand over her chest, either to diminish the purse's sway or to comfort and slow her erratic heart. For different reasons, Kevin hoped both.

And then her car was circling the drive; and a minute later just a moving black speck in the distance.

In his room now, time crept by like damp sand through an hourglass. He turned on his portable radio and found a popular station which gave newscasts and bulletins every half hour. It would happen, if it happened, somewhere between the sanitarium and Webber City, fifteen miles to the north, on the winding, two-lane mountain highway which led gradually down to Brentwood thirty-six miles away. The car's engine, in a mile or two or three, would be sufficiently warm by then. And then Aunt Tula would turn on the heater, because she always said she liked to drive in a warm car. Especially in near-zero weather, which was what the temperature had been hovering at all day.

An hour later, at two-thirty, the music coming from the radio was interrupted by the urgent, lowered, subdued voice of the disc jockey.

"We interrupt our midday music for this traffic bulletin. There has been a one-car accident on the Lake Serene Road, about eight miles south of Webber City, state police report. One fatality has been reported, a woman, whose identity is being withheld pending the notification of relatives. Motorists driving south on Lake Serene Road out of Webber City are advised to take alternate routes at either the junction to U.S. 12-A, or Harper's Corner Junction, until wreckage is cleared from the roadway. Repeating, a one-car fatality-accident on Lake Serene Road eight miles south of Webber City. Motorists are advised to take alternate routes. And now back to KBBO's Midday Serenade with the Lady in Mind. . ."

The station's regular newscast followed the bulletin a half hour later, but no further details on the accident were given except that during the weather-portion, a newsman warned motorists of an early freeze, with snow flurries by late afternoon, and to be watchful for black ice on all improved highways.

At three-thirty, Kevin Petty left his room and went down to

the first floor hallway where the residents' lounge ended and the corridor of administrative offices and clinic rooms began. There he pretended to scrutinize the life in a large square tank of fish, in reality peering through the azure, algaed waters at the distorted images of humans as they came down the hallway.

After five minutes, as per their habit, Dr. Railsforde came from his office with Miss Colltrane on his arm and after passing by Kevin without even noticing him, turned into the cafeteria for their afternoon coffee break.

When they had disappeared, Kevin went down the corridor, through the door into Miss Colltrane's cubicle and then through the inner door to Dr. Railsforde's office. In the middle drawer of his unlocked desk, lying in full view atop other papers, was the letter of confession written and signed by his Aunt Tula, which Kevin carefully folded and put in his hip pocket.

He was ready now.

Back in his room, Kevin dressed for chilly weather. He wriggled into three wool sweaters, squirmed into two pair of wool socks and two pair of flannel trousers. Then mackinaw jacket, wool gloves, his hiking boots, a scarf, and a woolen

sailor's watchcap he pulled down over his ears.

He went down a back staircase, which led out into a back arbor of leafless beeches, willows and elms. Here, he did not travel around to the front of the building and down the home's main driveway, but cut obliquely northwest through a barren apple orchard, the ground under him frozen rock hard and the grass stiff as brush bristles. His toes began to tingle lightly and the sky above him looked fat with snowflakes about to be delivered from the bellies of thick gray clouds. Several times he glanced back at the route over which he'd walked. No one was following him. No one knew yet he was gone.

When he finally met up with a northerly curve of Lake Serene Road, it was past four o'clock and night was beginning to smother the land slowly. All the cars that passed had their headlights on, but Kevin made no overt gestures that he was seeking a ride. He didn't want to take the risk of getting into a passenger car with a total stranger. His father, in the few brief years Kevin had known him, had warned him about that.

Ride with truck drivers, his father had said. Truck drivers were bonded and worked for companies and were carrying cargo and would not take any liberties with the law past giving a ride to a hitchhiker.

A half hour later, Kevin Petty had his ride, in the warm cab of a semi-van, whose round-bellied driver wore a black French beret and had buck teeth like fat, dark stones and a tattoo of a naked woman on his bare, right forearm. Appropriately, perhaps because his parents had named him for the size of front teeth they expected him to one day have, he said his name was Buck, that he was hauling a load of automatic washing machines and that he was on his way into Webber City.

"My name is Kevin."

"Kevin. . ."

"Kevin Petty," Kevin said. The cab smelled of sweet pipe tobacco, a maple aroma of the kind his father had smoked. The familiarity served to relax him. The feeling was returning to his toes, ears and fingers.

"Did you know," Kevin said, to make polite conversation, "that the iguanodon dinosaur of the Cretaceous period of Europe grew to a length of thirty feet and walked erect on its hind legs and therefore the present day little iguana may be taught to walk in that fashion because of its distant relatedness to the iguanodon dinosaur?

Nearly every renown scientist laughs at the possibility of an iguana being taught to walk on its hind legs, but I intend to train one and prove my theory."

The truck driver looked aghast. "I had utterly no scientific idea, Mr. Petty. And did *you* know that thus far in the history of athletics, only two brothers have ever won the National League batting titles on different occasions?"

"No, I did not know that."

"Indeed it is duly recorded in the annals of sport. Matty Alou for the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1966 and his brother Felipe for the San Francisco Giants in 1970."

"I shall remember that as a pointed fact to bring up in any future discussions of baseball I may have," said Kevin, seriously.

Snowflakes began splashing in small stars on the windshield and Buck started his windshield wipers.

"Kevin, what's a kid your age doing out on a highway in the middle of nowhere? You wouldn't be running away from home, would you, by any chance?"

"No, sir."

"Miss the school bus into Webber City, then?"

"No sir. I didn't miss the bus."

"Just decided to pass up a nice, warm ride home from school with your chums in favor of a brisk, fifteen-mile stroll through nature's wonderland, I suppose."

"No, sir. Where I would like to go, is to the Webber City Police Department."

"You won't for an instant believe this, Kevin, but I had in mind myself that very destination," Buck said. "In fact, I'll even take you right inside and get you all squared away personally. Service like that, you can't even beat with a long stick."

They went another two miles in silence, Buck slowing his truck as it swept around the gradual curves of Lake Serene Road. And then, very suddenly, a string of red automobile taillights appeared on the roadway up ahead. Buck shifted gears and the drag of the truck slowing snapped Kevin's head back just a fraction.

"Accident up ahead," he told Kevin. "Probably the one they had on the radio news about an hour or so ago. Asphalt may be easy on the tax dollar, but you can't see a sheet of ice on it for beans."

"Black ice," Kevin identified.

In fits and starts they inched forward. Up ahead of them a yellow wrecker was moving to-

ward them in the opposite lane, the crumpled body of an automobile hooked behind. And farther ahead Kevin could make out the elongated form of an ambulance.

"Did you know," said Kevin now, watching the truck's hood throb above the idling power of the engine, "that the brown fiddleback spider is as deadly as the midget killer scorpion of Arizona? Both snap with their stingers and one species of the midget killer scorpion once killed seven humans in a single year."

"Imagine that," said Buck, absently as his gloved hands clenched and unclenched impatiently on the steering wheel.

"The favorite food of the midget killer scorpion is the succulent banded gecko, a nocturnal lizard of the Southwestern United States. The brown fiddleback spider, on the other hand, is not quite the gourmet, being satisfied with earwigs and red ants chiefly."

"Well *my* favorite food is porterhouse steak, but if this Easter Parade doesn't get rolling, I'm going to settle for a sleeve of my leather jacket."

"It is very rare," Kevin went on, "to find a fiddleback spider surviving this far north. Their errant migration is a puzzle I haven't yet been able to figure out, but once offspring are born, the young brown fiddlebacks always seem to be able to find warmth enough to live. Moldings around furnaces, heating ducts in homes and buildings, indoor compost heaps. . ."

They passed by the ambulance, which was on the road shoulder on Kevin's side of the truck. Aunt Tula's body was lying on a stretcher in back. Her body and face were both covered from view by a blue blanket, but Kevin recognized the large shoulder-bag purse. It lay atop the blanket, its wide, floppy mouth open in Kevin's direction where, inside it, he caught just a brief flash of the small, white ring box with its single collapsible side.

"They are carnivorous, you know," said Kevin to Buck, whose rocky face was relaxing now that they were once more underway at normal speed.

"The brown fiddleback spider."

"And when they've gone for a time without food, they aren't awfully particular about the kind of flesh they feast on. Their deadly venom is released in the first few bites, purely as a defensive act, in case its prey is still alive. There is an antivenin, but it isn't always a successful counteractive. Humans with heart trouble rarely survive its bite."

"Well, remind me to proper-

ly introduce myself to any spiders I may meet," said Buck. "So I'll be able to tell the good guys from the bad guys."

"Oh, the brown fiddleback is easily identifiable," said Kevin, informationally, though not without feeling in his small chest a sharp twinge of sadness and loss. "On their glossy backs can be discerned a design which looks a great deal like the neck and the upper portions of a fiddle."

"I'll remember to scrutinize my spiders very closely in the future," Buck told him. "Now, let's just concentrate on getting you to the Webber City Police Department. I'll bet you've got quite a little tale of woe spinning around inside your head."

"Yes, the police," Kevin said. He checked his hip pocket for the letter. It was still there. Then he turned his glance toward the large side mirror bracketed outside the door and watched the accident scene as it fell away from view. A globule of a tear was building in the corner of his left eye and he blotted it away with his left index finger, his nose picking up from it a small trace of scent from the earwig he'd crushed between his finger and thumb, the same acrid, bilelike scent he had transferred to the right side of Aunt Tula's neck when he'd hugged her.

The snow was coming down harder and faster now, in fat thick flakes that were sticking. It would grow too cold out there for a brown fiddleback spider to live. And so, helplessly thinking this tragic thought, as though he were standing before the open coffin of a loved one, Kevin Petty in final eulogy, whispered below his trembling breath, "Good-by, Stradivarius."

Coming Soon:

A New Exciting Thriller

BOOK OF SHADOWS

Featuring Mongo Frederickson

by GEORGE C. CHESBRO

STURM UND DRANG

Bones on the beach; bones and fresh bodies and an old man whose memories were too fresh, that's what confronted Johnny Hawk in a case of betrayal and espionage that had started thirty years earlier...

by EDWARD Y. BREESE

I SAT ON the terrace of one of Miami Beach's Swank hotels and watched the old men watch the girls. It was ten in the morning and the sun was warm. The bones of a mammoth breakfast were on the table before me.

The old men were manicured and barbered and most comfortably paunched. They wore three-carat diamond rings and hundred-fifty dollar pastel slacks or seventy-five dollar swimming trunks. Some of them wore dark glasses and some just let their eyelids droop, but all of them watched the bodies of the girls. In spite of the sunlight they reminded me of carrion crows, all in a row, waiting for the corpses to ripen on a stricken field.

I'm Johnny Hawk and I don't have to watch strange women in the sun. When I want a woman I go and get one. That's been the way with me for as long as I can remember. Whatever my sins, I've preferred they be those of commission and never omission.

I've been this and that, and a soldier of fortune. I've lived

with misfortune and on both sides of the law, and I learned the hard way how to use a knife and gun. I've somehow managed not to do the things that wouldn't let me sleep at night.

I had money that day from a couple of very lucky hits, and I was eating high on the hog. I was in business for myself. There were business cards in my pocket. Besides my name they also said, "Available in Time of Need—High Rates—Satisfaction Guaranteed".

I'm not a private eye. If you want your wife followed, do it yourself. I'm a private army; maybe private adjustor would be a better word. If you have unusual troubles, I can make the necessary adjustments for you.

I laced a third cup of coffee with heavy cream, put on a pair of polarized glasses against the glare, and opened the morning paper at random. The story was right there at the top of the page.

MYSTERY BONES UNEARTHED
VIOLENT DEATHS INDICATED

I read on:

"Bulldozers breaking ground for a new beach club and motel on Lonesome Key, forty miles north of Marathon, yesterday uncovered the skeletons of four men. The bones had apparently been hastily buried just above high tide mark and lain undiscovered for many years. Indications were that all the men had been shot to death, according to Monroe County Sheriff's Deputy L.C. Carson."

There was more. Dampness and the salinity of the ground had badly rotted the bones. No identification was found with any of the four. Local old-timers speculated that the men might have been killed in one of the smuggling wars that racked the area forty years ago. The Florida Keys have seen smugglers of booze, guns and dope, immigrant runners and wreckers. It was pointed out that the last piracy trial involving American citizens was held at Key West in the early twentieth century.

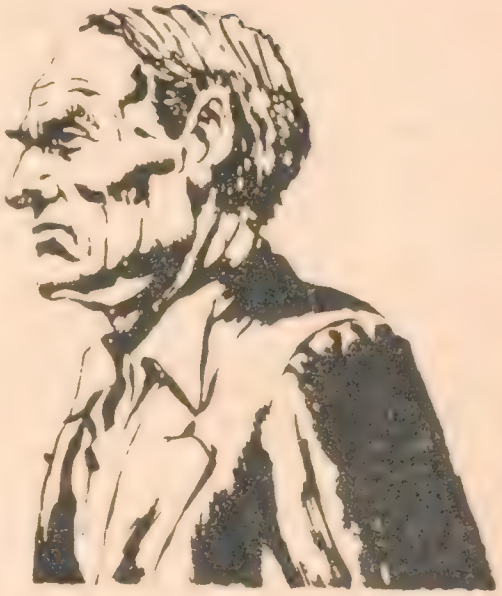
I turned the page and looked for the fishing news.

It was late afternoon of the following day when the phone in my room roused me from a peaceful nap. "There's a gentleman to see you, Mr. Hawk," the desk clerk said. "He says you don't know him. It's a business matter."

"Okay," I said. "Hold him five minutes while I get dressed and then send him up." I splashed cold water on my face and slipped into slacks and a sport shirt. Because my business clients might be anybody at all, I slipped a .44 derringer

in a clip holster inside my waistband under the shirt where it wouldn't show.

Then I answered a firm knock and opened the door for Otto Paul von Sturmer. He was old. What was left of his hair was white, and his skin had the pallor of age. The fat had melted off his six foot frame till the big bones showed through loose hanging skin. From the way he stood like a ramrod with feet close together I knew he would have preferred a uniform to the loose white suit he wore.



This had once been a powerful man. He was so old now that what power was left was all in his eyes. They were a pale, cold grey like ice in the North Sea, but they had the never-forgotten look of command.

"Good afternoon, General," I said on a hunch.

He didn't smile. "I see that your reputation is deserved, Mr. Hawk. Yes, I was once a general—under the Empire." I thought he was going to click his heels, but he didn't. "Now I am only Mr. Otto Paul von Sturmer, an American citizen."

He came into the living room of my suite and chose the best chair near the window, as if by right. The old German officer class had once liked to ape things English, so I mixed him a scotch and soda which he sipped with appreciation. I think his opinion of me went up another notch—and so did the fee I was going to charge him.

"I won't waste your time," he said. "Have you seen this?" He took something out of his pocket and gave it to me. It was the news clipping that I'd read the day before. I nodded.

"This has rather forced my hand, sir," he said. "I am going to go to the police in the morning and identify one of the bodies that was found. The moment I do that I will be in danger—I and more importantly my great-granddaughter who lives with me. I wish to employ your services, Mr. Hawk."

"As a bodyguard?" I asked.

"Let us say rather as an *aide de camp*," he said very seriously. "There will be danger, yes. An attempt may be made to kill us both. If that happens you may well be forced to risk your life for us. I may need you also as a sort of private detective. Who knows? In short you must engage to be totally at my service for a time."

"That's a big order, Mr. von Sturmer."

"Of course. I expect to pay in proportion to the danger involved. Shall we say a thousand dollars a day, with a guarantee of five days and a probability of up to two weeks?"

I hadn't thought he had that sort of money. "And expenses?" I asked.

"You have a sense of humor," he said, "and expenses of course."

"Before we shake hands, two things," I said. "First I have to know what this is about. I mean the truth, and all of the truth. If I find out later you've lied or held out something, I quit right then. Secondly, I'm not a contract man, a murderer for hire. If it's that you want, there are others to go to."

"Fair enough," he said. "I respect your conditions, and I agree. If you have to kill, it will be only in defense. A von Sturmer does not hire assassins, sir. I have waited twenty-five years to find a certain man. When I do, I will kill him myself."

We shook hands then. Over his whiskey and soda, looking out to where the Gulf Stream made a deep blue highway in the sea, he told me his story. He got right to the point. I've condensed it only a little.

Von Sturmer had every reason to believe that one of the bodies in the Keys had been his grandson. Franz had been a captain in Hitler's army and fought in Poland and France. Because he'd been specially trained by Otto Von Skorczeny, and for other reasons, young Sturmer had been picked in 1942 to be landed in the United States as a special agent and saboteur.

At that time German subs were operating with relative freedom off the South Florida coast. One of them had brought Franz and three companions in close to the upper Keys and put them into an inflatable rubber boat to paddle the half mile to Lonesome Key, which was then quite undeveloped. The four had American clothing and credentials. All of them had spent pre-war time in this country and knew the customs and vernacular.

They were to be met at rendezvous point and driven into

Miami by car. Once in the city they could melt into a well-organized fifth column which was supplying the subs with information, and even, in those early days, with food and fuel oil.

"They never reached Miami, Mr. Hawk," the old man said. "These were four very dangerous men; armed, experienced, alert, dedicated to success. In fair fight they could have stood off a company. Instead of that, they vanished without a trace, not even a line in the newspapers. That is, until yesterday."

"You're sure of your facts?"

He was sure. Friends in the wartime and post-war German governments had made all their information available to him. Then he'd moved himself and Franz's orphaned daughter to Florida and spent many years running down every clue.

"You think that strange, Mr. Hawk? We are a very old family, and Franz was the last living male. The others died in battle. He was murdered."

"Now we're getting to the point," I said. "Why do you call it murder?"

"And not war?" He looked at me keenly. "It was murder. There was only one man on the American mainland who knew the rendezvous point. He was one of our agents here. Only he could have arranged a quiet killing. They were not met or discovered by a military patrol. I have investigated, bribed, talked to men who were here. There would have been a record.

"They were entrapped by someone they trusted and killed with no chance for their lives. You ask me why? Two reasons, I think. We found out later that our man was a double agent, working also for the American Intelligence. Also they had with them an iron chest containing $250,000 in genuine American currency supplied by the Gestapo for the use of our people here. That money never reached the hands for which it was intended."

"I begin to see the pattern now," I said. "You want the double agent of course. But why haven't you found him? I'd have thought that would be easy enough with the help of your friends in the German government."

Von Sturmer actually sighed. "So did I once. I thought it would be easy. How naive of me. As the War was ending, so many records were destroyed. Records of our agents and their contacts were among the first to go. I know him only by a code name and a cover identity. I think not even the Americans knew who he really was. I can't be absolutely sure of that. Still,

I found and bribed certain underlings who would very probably have known. I even got copies of a file. They showed only a cover name. The man was very clever.

"Now the bodies have been found. It was not important to find them before. I knew they must be dead, and there were so many places they could lie. These must be the right ones. But the finding of the bones changes everything. I will identify one of them in any case."

"Then what?"

"Then I have a plan. I will give him reason to come to me. It will be reason he cannot resist. But come; you had better pack what you need, Mr. Hawk. I want you to live at my home until this is over." Then he showed his own sense of humor. "It will save something of the expenses."

II

THE VON STURMER home was in the older section of Miami, not far from the Bay. It was still a mansion, though a good forty years out of style. Some of the rooms had not been used for a long while. There was heavy, antique furniture, dark oils, including the expected posturing portrait of Wilhelm II, and a library of books in at least four languages.

The setting fitted Otto Paul von Sturmer very well indeed. It obviously hadn't been planned by his granddaughter. Elsa was the classic Nordic ash-blonde with a figure from Die Valkyrie. She had to be near thirty but looked about twenty-one.

She greeted me with a firm handshake and a quick feminine smile. I could see her appraise me in the way of the unmarried woman and decide, "a little too old, and a lot too hard." I returned the smile and resisted an impulse to bow over her hand.

Despite the absence of servants we dined from monogramed silver and Dresden plates. Elsa cooked and managed everything. After dinner I inspected the house and grounds. If von Sturmer was in danger of attack, I wanted to be familiar with the defenses.

The doors were heavy, and the windows protected by an old-style heavy ornamental iron grille. There was a low rock wall around the lot line and far too much ornamental shrubbery for my taste. Anyone who took advantage of it could get right up to the house unobserved. One point I did like. Unlike most Miami homes, this had two stories and an attic. None of the bedrooms were at ground level. I decided to sleep

on the great, comfortable living room couch instead of in a bed.

I found von Sturmer waiting for me in the library. He offered me a choice of strong, black coffee and brandy. I laced the one with the other. "Tell me," I said, "why you think identifying a body will bring your man out of cover after so many years? Why should he come out?"

"The guilty sleep light," my host said. "For twenty-five years he has feared this, I am sure. My announcement will make a good story for the papers. He will read it. He, at least, will know that it is true. It will be a shock to him. He will be frightened, and scared men do not think clearly. Then I have another bait for the trap which you will know about tomorrow."

"Suppose he doesn't read the story?" I said. "Have you thought of that? He may be far from here."

"I think he is still close by. I have a few facts about him. One is that he lived in this area. Certainly he had property. He would likely stay here. To move might arouse suspicion. Besides, he would feel his trail was covered—his secret safe. I have not any reason to believe he moved away. It is a chance, of course."

"Then why should he be so afraid? Surely he could claim that whatever he did was an act of war. The American government would not be likely to touch him for a killing twenty-five years ago. The new German authorities certainly wouldn't bother?"

"You forget something," von Sturmer said. "First, he will now be revealed as a traitor to America. I have, in my safe here, proofs supplied by German friends of the aid he gave us. The few documents not destroyed. Depositions I obtained from witnesses. Public knowledge of these things will destroy him locally, even if it did not send him to prison.

"Then there is the matter of a quarter of a million dollars in American currency. I know it was never turned in. The authorities will want to know about that.

"He will be afraid of me. During the war I talked freely that I meant to avenge my Franz. I offered a reward in money for his killer. It was known in Germany and among our people here. I know now that was unwise. It must be one reason why he has hidden his trail so well."

"He could have heard of it," I said. "That would account for some of it."

We were both sleepy. I finished my coffee and we

turned in for the night. I slept soundly. It may have been a mistake. In the morning there were footprints in the soft ground under the windows. No attempt had been made to break in. I decided not to tell von Sturmer.

In the morning I drove von Sturmer in his big Buick all the way down the overseas highway to the Monroe County Morgue in Key West. A startled Coroner's Deputy watched him check the skulls against a set of dental X-rays he said were his grandson's. One of them matched perfectly to the deputy's great surprise.

Von Sturmer put in a formal claim for all the bones. They were no longer articulated, of course, and could not be identified except for the skulls. He left instructions they were to be sent to a Miami mortician for cremation, and agreed to handle all expenses.

The skull he had identified had two bullet holes; a small entrance hole high on the forehead and a much larger exit hole low down at the back. As I read the signs he must have been shot by someone standing over him as he lay on the ground. Otherwise a bullet fired into the head would have angled up, not down.

A reporter for the Key West paper stopped us on our way out. Probably the deputy had called him. "Not now," von Sturmer said. "I will talk to all reporters when I get home in Miami. I promise you I will have much to say about this horrible crime."

"Crime?"

"Exactly. These four men were murdered in cold blood. It is time now that their killer be brought to justice." He refused to say any more.

When we were driving home over Seven Mile Bridge I decided to tell him about the prowler of the night before. He already knew.

"An old man sleeps lightly," he said. "He looked in at you for a while and then went all round the house. It is a good sign. Someone has known about me, and the finding of the bodies has stirred him up. He will be scared already. I shall see that he gets more so."

"Tonight," I said. "I'll stay awake."

"That is well."

The word had gone ahead of us to Miami as von Sturmer had intended that it should. We found Elsa already under siege by the newspaper and television reporters. She had them in the big living room drinking coffee and whiskey. In an ice-blue linen dress, she was cool and unruffled by the the crowd and confusion. I couldn't help

wondering what she thought of the whole business, but she gave no sign. The younger men present were all about her.

The old general posed for the cameras under the portrait of his dead Kaiser; ramrod straight in his white linen suit. He was most impressive. Even the most flippant of the newshawks fairly oozed respectful attention.

As he'd planned, it was a sensation. He gave them the same story he'd already told me, but with additions and embellishments. "I have given much of my life," he said, "to tracking down the murderer of these young men—these young soldiers. He did well in covering his tracks, but murder must seek the light. It needed only the finding of the bodies. I have evidence that one of those I have been watching was in the area of Lonesome Key on the day of the murder. So you see; now I am sure."

"Who was it?" One man spoke for all.

"Not yet, my friends. There is one more thing I must have Mr. Hawk check for me. I will name the killer. Yes, but not today. I will name him at the funeral of my grandson. Over the ashes of my dead boy I shall deliver his murderer to justice."

They weren't very happy

about that. They wanted the whole answer right now. He wouldn't give it to them. He retired behind an impenetrable aura of aristocratic dignity while I gradually shepherded the crowd out of the house with Elsa's help.

There were a couple of them I was particularly glad to see go. As part of my job I'd been watching the crowd and I was pretty sure these weren't news men. They tried hard all right, but they simply didn't fit the part. I was pretty sure one of them was wearing a gun. Still, they left with the others without making any trouble.

Only one man lingered after the rest had gone. He was a nice looking young man, not much older than Elsa, in a dark business suit with a snap-brim soft straw hat in his hand. I'd noticed him watching

Elsa off and on through the whole production, and right off I figured that was why he'd waited.

"Sorry, sir," I said. "The interview is all over for today."

He had a quick, engaging smile and a soft, Southern voice. "Not for me," he said. "I'm on official business, Johnny Hawk."

"You know me?" I got braced.

"Relax," he said. "I'm only surprised *you* don't know *me*. The name is Harding. Carl Harding of. . ."

"Lieutenant Carl Harding of Miami Homicide," I finished for him. "I should have known Captain Ryan would want to be in on this."

He kept on smiling. "Right. We like to know what's going on in our front yard, particularly when it means trouble."

Old von Sturmer had come up in time to hear him. "Very well, Lieutenant," he said. "You heard what I told the others. I will have a statement for the police. But not now. At the funeral."

"I'm sorry about that, sir. You could save a lot of trouble for us, and maybe your own life, by speaking up now. You know that, don't you?"

"I know that. But I am an old man. I do not worry about my life. Right now Mr. Hawk must worry about that."

"Not alone, he won't," Harding said firmly. "I'm under orders to stay with you, Mr. von Sturmer. I'm to give police protection."

"What if I don't want your protection:"

"You can put me out of the house if you insist. Then I'll have to spend the night in a car in front on the street."

"Oh, don't be stubborn, grandfather," Elsa said suddenly. "The young man can stay for dinner and the night. It will do no harm, surely."

"I'll try not to be any trouble, sir. Tonight I can take Johnny Hawk's place on the couch and let him sleep in a bed. By your interview this afternoon you've made yourself bait in a trap. As a detective it's my job to keep the bait from being eaten."

Von Sturmer gave him a long look. "Your captain is a better policeman than I had thought," he said. "All right then. You can take Mr. Hawk's place tonight. Now let us all have something to eat."

At dinner Harding sat next to Elsa. They talked constantly and got on very well together. They liked the same books and seemed to know some of the same people. I could see their eyes light up as they talked.

Afterwards I got Harding alone for a minute and asked him about the two suspicious

looking characters at the interview. "I saw them," he said. "The big one is okay. He's just a free lance writer. Stringer for a couple of sensational detective tabloids. The little one with the gun is Pat Silliman."

I knew who Pat Silliman was by reputation. In himself, he probably wasn't dangerous. As a hood, Silliman was definitely small-time—a peanut gangster. He pushed a little pot around town to the college kids, took numbers bets, pimped when he could. Not dangerous in himself. Then it hit me. "Doesn't he pimp for Red Maudie's houses?"

"He always has," Harding said.

"Yes," I said. "And Red Maudie's last name is Meyer. The first house she ever had wasn't in Miami, not even in the States. It was a long time ago, and it was in Hamburg. A sailor who recognized her told me once. Harding, I think I'll go into town tonight."

"I can't stop you, Johnny. But I can warn you. Just remember you don't wear a badge. Anything you turn up, you tell me, and I pass to Captain Ryan."

"Why, sure," I said.

"Mind you do remember it. And get back here early, if you can. I'm going into town myself for a little while to pick up a bag at my place. I think the old man is safe enough this early."

III

WE DROVE off at the same time. I headed for the little upper 27th Avenue Bars where I figured to find Pat Silliman. He was in a dirty little joint called Kooky's. The hip-cats said "Kooky's Krawls With Kreeps" and that's what it was doing.

I found Pat Silliman drinking by himself at the bar. It was so dark he had trouble recognizing me when I tapped his shoulder. When he did he came outside peacefully enough. He wasn't too drunk to know I could beat him to a gun with no trouble at all.

"What do you want?" he said as soon as we got outside.

"What were you doing in society today?" I asked him.

"None of your business."

I got his right wrist in my left hand and twisted the arm behind his back. With my right hand I took the lit cigarette out of my mouth and held it half an inch from the tip of his nose—close enough for him to feel the heat.

"I'm going to shove this up your nose," I said. "The only question is which side gets it." I waited.

"Okay. Okay. I'll talk. Take that damned thing away."

"What were you doing at a press conference, punk?"

"Maudie tol' me to go."

"What for?" I snapped at the punk quickly.

"So I could tell her everything the old creep said. That's all. Honest that's all. I don't know why."

I believed him. "Did you tell her?"

"Yeah, on the phone. Honest, that's all I know."

"Okay. I'll believe you this time. You better scram, though. Captain Ryan is looking for you too. He might not swallow your story so easy." I let go his arm, and he got out of there.

I didn't try to go looking for Red Maudie. There were too many places where she might be, and all of them would be watched and guarded. Right then it was enough for me to know that she was interested.

Besides that I was sure Pat Silliman would have phoned her right off. By the time ten minutes had passed there'd be people looking for me all over town. The safest as well as the smartest thing I could do right then was to head back for von Sturmer's place. That's what I did.

When I turned my car into the driveway the light was on over the front door. Harding's police car was parked on the street, and the old man's Buick was ahead of me in the drive. The whole downstairs part of the house was lit up, but drapes and venetian blinds kept me from seeing in.

Otto Paul von Sturmer answered the door himself. He cracked it a bit at first and then opened wide when he recognized me. A broad belt of light poured out across the green lawn.

It was at that instant I heard the car. It was still early, and traffic was running, but this was a quiet street. It was a big car, and the engine was tuned to a purr, but I heard the tires squeal at the corner.

Instinct, sharp-honed by years of danger, took hold of me. It was the purr of a big motor and a whisper of tires coming fast, but it triggered me into action. I didn't even stop to look over my shoulder. I hurled myself on the old man and forced him down to the floor, trying desperately to cover his body with my own. We went down in a sprawl of arms and legs.

The spatter of burp-gun slugs went over my back to smash the standing mirror at the far end of the long hall. The car went by fast, and the gunner had time for only one stuttering burst. If I'd been a split second slower, he would have had us both. Von Sturmer was so shaken up I don't think he even heard the gun.

Harding heard it though. He

came out of the library at a dead run with his lips skinned back and a long-barrelled police positive revolver already in his hand. He swung left for the door, almost instantly tripped on the flailing mess of legs on the floor, and nearly went down himself. His shoulder slammed into the door frame with a solid thud. That kept him on his feet, but it also slowed him down. By the time he got to the street I was right behind him with my own gun out.

The car must have turned the corner almost at once. There was nothing in sight or hearing range. We looked at each other, cursed under our breaths, and went back to the house.

Elsa had been in the library talking to Harding. She had the old man off the floor and onto the couch and was fixing him a whiskey and soda. Von Sturmer was proving he'd deserved his general's epaulets in the old days. Far from being scared, he was actually almost triumphant.

"I knew it," he said. "The pig-dog is still in Miami. He is scared! The scum wants me killed. Well, we shall see." Then he looked at me. "Thank you, Mr. Johnny Hawk," he said. "I did not hear him coming at all. The hearing suffers as a man gets old. I shall not forget."

I would bet on that. Otto Paul von Sturmer was not a man to forget.

Whatever Elsa had thought about all this before, she knew by now that the game was in deadly earnest. She had courage, though, and knew that the old man would not draw back. She did not cry or complain or let him see that she was afraid for him. I could see—and so could Harding. By this time the lieutenant was obviously smitten by her.

After Harding phoned in to Captain Ryan we got the old man up to his bedroom. Then Harding and I made the rounds, switching on the front and rear door lights and checking doors and windows. Neither of us really thought there'd be another attack right away.

"Ryan has a special patrol car in this area now," Harding said. "Also he's got all his regular stoolies sniffing around to pick up a lead on who ordered that last hit."

"Red Maudie?" I asked.

"I don't know yet," he said thoughtfully. "It was a professional job and that means a contract man anybody could hire. Did the old fellow ever say anything to indicate he thought his 'man' might be a woman?"

"Never," I said. "He's kept his guess as to actual names

very much under his hat. I know he's got a name to tell, but not who it is he'll finger."

"Do you think the girl knows?" In Harding's mouth the question sounded oddly important. I'd begun to suspect why, but I didn't let on.

"Elsa?" I said. "No. I'm sure she doesn't. He said so." He hadn't of course, but I wanted Harding to believe me.

I took the room at the right side of the stair landing and left my door open when I lay down on the bed. I put my gun on the floor under the bed. If I went to sleep and somebody came in, they'd look under the pillow first for it. Elsa was in the room across from me. Von Sturmer had the big bedroom at the end of the hall.

I left my shirt and pants on. It made me slightly uncomfortable, but it also kept me from sleeping too heavily. As a result the faint creak of a loose stair tread woke me in time to see Harding come quietly up to the landing. He was fully dressed and his face told me nothing of what he might be thinking. I wasn't surprised to see him there.

It was a surprise when the other bedroom door opened and Elsa came out looking like an angel in a white robe. He was so quiet she almost bumped into him. They both jumped.

"Just doing my rounds," he said, barely above a whisper.

"Oh," she said. "Oh, yes. You startled me. I'm not sleeping well, I'm afraid, and I decided to go downstairs for a glass of milk. Won't you join me, Carl?"

He nodded, and they went downstairs together. The luminous dial of my watch said three AM. When I heard her come back up it was after five.

IV

THE NEXT DAY, Thursday, passed quietly enough. We none of us left the house. The Miami mortician called. He had the bones and would go ahead with cremation. The four urns would be ready for a funeral service at ten o'clock Friday morning.

Von Sturmer had me call all the news media to be there. They already had the story of the attempted hit the night before. We were under siege all day by reporters watching the house.

Captain Ryan checked by late in the morning for a long talk with Harding and to try and get the General to talk. The old man only repeated what he'd said before.

"You're making a bad mistake," Ryan said. "The wire services have put this story in every paper in the country by now. Next thing we know

somebody'll be selling excursion tickets to see you killed tomorrow. After what's happened already, you know there'll be a try for you."

"Of course," von Sturmer said. "In his place I'd do the same. I have confidence in you and Lieutenant Harding and your men."

Ryan shook his head. "We'll do our best, but it may not be good enough. You insist on a public service on the burial grounds. Nobody can guarantee safety in the open. Think what a man with a rifle and telescopic sight can do."

"There has to be justice, sir," the General said. "I have faith that the murderer will be taken."

According to Ryan's pigeons the educated guess downtown said that Red Maudie had ordered the hit of the night before. There was no absolute proof as yet, but that sort of guess is usually right. Ryan was having her watched.

In the afternoon a man from the F.B.I. came by. He was a nice, gentlemanly young fellow. Uncle was interested in the $250,000. Von Sturmer gave him a whiskey and invited him to the funeral.

I noticed that Harding and Elsa were seldom more than a few feet apart all day. It was a budding romance, if ever I've seen one. I even envied him a little. She was beautiful, intelligent, brave and a lady. No man could ask for more. I remember thinking he didn't look nearly as happy as I would have in his place.

In the late afternoon von Sturmer and I played chess in the library while Harding "helped" Elsa in the kitchen. We had German style beef with horseradish sauce and potato pancakes.

Outside in the street the day shift of reporters and TV men went home and a new crew came on. I decided they'd be

watching the house all night from the front. The only way an attacker could get at the house unseen would be by cutting through the block from the other side.

Unfortunately, there was plenty of ornamental shrubbery to give cover from that direction. I wondered if the news people deliberately left that avenue of approach open in the hopes of having a gun battle to cover. I wouldn't put it past them.

I had my own ideas as to what the night would bring forth. In the event, I turned out to be both right and wrong. Even the best of us miss sometimes.

Von Sturmer went up to bed about ten o'clock saying he wanted to be well rested for the next day. I followed as soon as Harding and I had made our rounds. I left my door open and stayed partly dressed again. I did take off my shoes and put on a pair of soft-soled glove leather Miami Casuals so I could move noiselessly in case of emergency.

I put my gun under the bed again, but this time I strapped my little .44 derringer in its rig on my right arm under the shirt sleeve. That way I had instant fire power without having to reach for anything. I'd had a good nap during the day, and I didn't plan on sleeping at all.

It was after one o'clock before Elsa came quietly up the stairs. I couldn't see her eyes, but by the way she walked I'd have sworn there would be stars in them. If I could have seen. . . .

Downstairs the big gilt clock eventually struck two. After what seemed like a couple of centuries, it got around to striking three. Not even a shadow flickered in the dimly lit hall.

I didn't really *hear* him coming at all. This time he stepped over the loose board. He moved like a ghost. But I knew he was coming moments before he came into my line of vision. How? I don't know. I guess I'd been hunted often enough in the past so I'd developed the same sort of radar a fox has —or a rabbit crouching for its life. Something inside me knew he was coming. That's all.

It was Harding of course. It had to be Harding. I'd known that when he slipped and had said he knew I'd slept on the couch the first night. The only one outside the family who could know that was the man who'd stood outside and looked in the windows. Harding couldn't have had orders to do that till Captain Ryan had heard from the Key West Sheriff's office the day after the watcher had stood there.

Of course there was a chance I'd been wrong. A good cop might have assumed a bodyguard would use the couch. My doubts on that line had been dispelled when Harding had come upstairs the night before. That time, though, Elsa had come out and intercepted him.

Whatever doubts I'd had vanished now when I saw his face. It was chalk white and the lips were skinned back off his teeth. He had a gun in his hand. It wasn't his police positive, but a flat, black automatic I hadn't known he had. He was by my door in a flash.

I came out of bed soundlessly with the derringer in my hand. I can move like a ghost myself. I got to the hall as he reached the old man's bedroom door. It was ajar, and he very carefully pushed it wide open.

In the rays of the dim nightlight in the hall, we could both see the big, antique four-poster bed under its heavy silk canopy. Miami's too hot for blankets of course, but the old man's body showed under a sheet. He lay on his side with his back to the door and his head hidden in the big goose-feather pillows. It was an easy shot.

Harding levelled the automatic. My thumb began to ease back the hammer of the derringer. I couldn't reach Harding

before he fired. I'd have to shoot him. At that range the .44 slug would break his spine and kill him instantly. I didn't want to do it. I even liked the guy. But I was going to kill him.

His arm sagged, and he lowered the gun. By some miracle I had managed to hold my own fire.

Harding stood there looking into the room, not moving. It felt like an hour passed. Noiselessly, without warning, his gun still pointed towards the floor, he spun on his heel to come back down the hall. The instant he did, he saw me, and my derringer still aimed at his heart. He looked like he'd run into a cement wall. For an instant I thought he'd try for me. His eyes flickered, but he let his gun hang.

Behind him, the door to the walk-in clothes closet swung quietly open. Otto Paul von Sturmer stood there with a German Army Luger in his hand. He'd been waiting; resting in a straight-backed chair. The figure in the bed was a dummy.

For a long moment the three of us stood there. What was there for any one of us to say? The shadow of murder coiled like a cobra in the center of the triangle we formed.

I broke the spell. I slipped my derringer back into its holster.

"Mr. Hawk." Von Sturmer seemed surprised at what I'd done.

"It's all right," I said. "You put away the Luger. We won't any of us need a gun now. The time for that's gone."

Harding said nothing at all. He simply watched us. Finally von Sturmer tossed his gun onto the big bureau. Harding put his back in its holster.

"Johnny's right," he said. "If there ever really was a time for guns, it's gone now and done with."

"You've been a cop too long," I said. "When it came right down to it you couldn't pull trigger."

"I guess," he said. "I guess."

Von Sturmer walked over and sat down on the side of the bed. He looked about a hundred and ten years old. "But why?" he said. "Why? You're a young man. You would have been only a child. I don't think you're the kind to kill for hire. No, no. Yet I saw you outside the window the other night. I was right to wait for you tonight. So why?"

At first Harding said nothing at all. I spoke for him. "Why is Elsa helping you?" I asked the old man. "Harding has family too. That's why he felt he had to shoot, even though he

couldn't at the end. That's what it has to be."

Still Harding said nothing at all. He just stood there, dying by slow inches. "Was it your father?" I said. "Father, grandfather or uncle. It had to be one of them. We can check it now that we know where to look."

That did it. He squared his shoulders and brought his eyes up. "So you can," he said. "All right then. My father. He was one of two men who killed the Germans. They had the password and the rendezvous coordinates and a bottle of doped Hollands gin. They were doped and then murdered in their stupor."

"Vengeance is mine," said the old man from the bedside.

"Hold on," I said. "There has to be more than that. Why did he do it, Harding?"

"Because he was an addict," Harding said, "and couldn't buy his dope. Because he was paid ten thousand dollars for the job. Because he never was any good. How do I know? He told me on his deathbed that he did it. He never really told me why. The money he got was soon gone. My mother's still alive. I've got two sisters. He left us long ago, but he could shame us still. I thought I had to cover the tracks for their sake. I couldn't do it. That's all."

"Who else's tracks would be covered?" I asked. "If he only got ten thousand, who got the rest? Who planned the job and ordered it? Who was the real double agent and the real killer?"

"I can't prove it," he said, "but I think you know already."

"Red Maudie," I said. "Mrs. Maude Meyer of Hamburg and Miami. She's the one to play both sides against the middle for a quarter of a million dollars."

"That's it. Maude Meyer. Cover name for Germany, Mannerheim; for the United States, Mandelbaum. Neither side knew she was a woman. That's why you couldn't find your man. It was a woman. My father told me the whole story when he was dying. Even he wasn't supposed to know who it was, but he did several jobs for her. He found out almost by accident. She got paid by both sides. She also got the $250,000—all but what she paid the killers."

"Now," I filled in, "she's afraid it will all come out at once plus plenty more we may not know about. Our own government will still want her out. That's why she's willing to kill. But how about you? Why should you have thought you had to kill?"

"Yes," von Sturmer said.

"You are of the police. Your father is already dead. What is killing worth for you?"

"Nothing was," I reminded him, "when it came to the final point."

Von Sturmer still looked at Harding.

"I honestly don't know why I thought I could do it," Harding said. "I asked in on this case to begin with partly to find out how much you really knew. Also I knew Maudie would try to have you killed. If you only knew her name, I'd protect you. I had some crazy notion if you knew about my father I might let her get to you. For the sake of my mother and sisters. You're an old man, what would a couple more years mean to you? Crazy—but I felt half crazy. After all this time."

"What changed your mind, boy?" Otto asked.

"Maudie sent word—by her man at the press meeting—a note. Either I kill you or she had you and Elsa killed. That tore it. I couldn't think straight till a minute ago when I thought I had you under my gun. Then I couldn't pull the trigger."

The silence lay between us like something solid and tangible. Each of us had his own thoughts. Harding spoke again.

"You'll call off the press session tomorrow," he said. "It's too dangerous. I'll call in Captain Ryan and the F.B.I. tonight and tell them all I know. That's enough to take Maudie into custody. When they really check her activities in the war years with the information I can give, they'll turn up proof enough. Nothing can be hidden when they know what they're looking for."

"That's right," I said. "You know it'll probably mean your job?"

"That's the least of my worries," Harding said.

Otto von Sturmer looked hard at him. "Oh yes," he said. "Elsa, of course. I can't give my blessing to the son of her father's murderer. I'm too old to change that much. You must wait. It will only be a year or two. When I die Elsa will make her own decisions. That is the best I can say tonight. I will forget just how you came to tell me these things. I will ask them to let you keep your job. You are a good policeman. They may listen."

"You owe him that," I said. "Now let's call Captain Ryan. He won't mind being waked."

Ryan didn't mind at all.

"YOUR HELL JUST FROZE OVER!"

In poker, Tex Browder knew, concentration is everything, but when the stakes are life and death, it isn't enough.

by PAUL YAWITZ

TEX BROWDER waddled his 46-inch waistline up the six steps of the 15th Precinct Station, wiggled his stubby forefinger in perfunctory greeting to the desk sergeant, and swung his short frame gingerly into the corridor toward Captain Jason's office.

He had been called less than an hour before and requested "to come in for a talk." Browder knew why. The morning before he had been shaving when the early news blurted the dismal details of the murder of Honeywell Wilson. And Browder still carried in his mind the wince he saw on his own face in the mirror. Tex Browder suffered a deep sense of depression.

Copyright, 1974, by Paul Yawitz

Honeywell had been one of his favorites among the colorful newcomers who were scrambling for stature among the gambling pros. Tex was one to recognize talent in the bud. "This kid's carving himself a saga," he had remarked. "Sits on his haunches and defies the wind. Knows all the odds and whips 'em clean-cut. I tell you he's tainted—with class."

Captain Jason's upper teeth rested meditatively on a clenched fist. His worried eyes were question marks. Browder didn't wait to be addressed.

"You sent for me 'cause you're a coon up a tree with no place to go."

"Right," the Captain conceded.

"You've already collared a dozen suspects—but their alibis check?"

Jason's almost imperceptible nod affirmed the inference.

"Honeywell was a coming champ. Best five-card stud man since The Cincinnati Kid." Tex Browder doffed his wide-brimmed hat. "It's a prickly-cactus shame to see a good yearling croppered by a thievin' stable boy—"

Jason *garumphed* him to a sharp stop. "Save the eulogy for the funeral. Any ideas who this so-called stable boy could be?"

Browder rejected the impatience. "Even a side-winder's got to build up steam for a job. You're chokin' my warm-up, Captain."

Jason forced a smile of tolerance. "The killer's loose. He dropped his victim with a .32 while they played cards alone, no one knows where. No witnesses. But none. You know gamblers we've never heard of. Name some!"

Browder paused for an inventorial gaze at the officer. "You guys sometimes can't find a seed in a pomegranate. Name some, huh!"

"Is insulting us your way of warming up?"

Browder ignored the barb. "Ever hear of 'Eye-Shade' Bosley? They had him on the county road gang for thirty days. Just came out day before yesterday. Must have been as hungry as a coyote."

"One of the first we rousted," said Jason. "Would have held him longer just for policy but his mouthpiece sprung him on a habeas. Looked and sounded clean. He's not our man."

"Cut and dried alibi, eh?"

"Said he went straight to his house after his release from the can. Watched the late show on TV—he's a nut for movies—then fell asleep for ten hours with the TV still on. We can't prove different."

"Where'd you pick the guy up?"

"At the Bijou picture house. Told us every line on the TV program during the hours before and after Honeywell was killed. He couldn't have been watching the set and playing stud at the same time. Nobody's got that concentration. Glad to get the stinker out of here."

"My advice is to pick up Bosley quickr'n you can make a maverick buck!"

Jason protested: "Can't do that unless we got a new charge."

"Okay, then," Browder said dramatically, "I'll swear out a warrant for his arrest. My .32's missing. I'll lay 100-to-1 it was my gun that did it."

This blasted Jason to his feet and he shouted. "Your gun? How the hell do we know that you didn't actually kill the boy?"

"Cool it, bronco," Browder said as he reached for the door. "Just bring Bosley in and leave the rest to me." Then as if an after-thought, he added, "Oh, yeah, my alibi? I was the Mayor's guest at the Salamander for dinner and the show all night. Even shot a little craps."

Six hours later Bosley, confident and defiant, was stretched out in a leather chair in Jason's office. Tex Browder was drilling fiercely into the suspect's armor with little success. "No comment. Lawyer's instructions."

"When you were released from jail, you came to me for a stake. I ripped off five bills. You thanked me but being an onery thief you lifted my gun from a dresser just for good measure. Then you went out

looking for a two-handed stud session with Honeywell. You never liked him. You wanted to get rich on him."

"Bang away, tubby. I'll last longer than the Wailin' Wall." He blew purple stogy smoke into Browder's face.

"You thought you'd needle him into a careless bet but he didn't fall. When you lost the five, your ire went wild and you shot him dead. Only way you could beat him. You didn't go home at all—"

"Hell'll freeze over before you can prove that."

"—you went to the twenty-four hour movie theatre. You haven't been inside your own apartment since you landed in the can a month ago.

"I went out to the murder scene," Browder dogged on. "There was a TV right behind Honeywell's chair. You watched it every chance you had. No wonder you could recite the programs. You're relying on the fact there were no witnesses. Maybe the police were helpless. But I ain't."

"I'm laughing, laughing, laughing. Where'd you buy your detective kit, man?"

It was more than Jason could take. "I'm throwing this crumb-bum back in his cell." Browder folded his Buddha-like arms on his fat chest. "First, let's give this killer something to grieve about." Bosley's lips went suddenly dry.

Tex Browder spoke slowly. "I checked with the electric company. If you'd of had your set on for the twelve hours, the meter would have shown it. Twelve hours of television uses one kilowatt plus of power. But your meter hasn't moved a hair-line since last month."

Bosley's chin sank in a clinching doom. Jason roughed him to his feet. "You'll need that alley lawyer of yours to pray for you. Your hell just froze over."

THE STORM TUNNEL

by BILL PRONZINI

Coming in April! Don't miss this extraordinary tale of taut suspense by one of America's most brilliant young authors! Exclusive! All new! Watch for it!

MIKE SHAYNE READERS

You May Have Missed These Four CHARLIE CHAN Adventures

If you've not yet discovered our famed companion publication, CHARLIE CHAN MYSTERY MAGAZINE, you may not have read any or all of the previously published issues. And if you are a real dyed-in-the-wool Charlie Chan fan—and who isn't?—you'll want to read them. We have a very limited supply left of the four back copies and they are yours—by filling out the conveniently printed coupon. Each issue also contains—besides a new Charlie Chan book-length novel—short stories and novelets by prominent writers in the mystery, crime and detective story field.

NOW AVAILABLE at 50¢ FOR EACH COPY

☐ . . . WALK SOFTLY, STRANGLER
Who murdered Madame Wu? A sparkling entertainment and a gem that sparkled falsely, led Charlie Chan to murder's domain!

☐ . . . THE SILENT CORPSE
Charlie Chan attended his friend's funeral, then found himself drugged! Only a scrap of cloth could possibly save him!

☐ . . . THE TEMPLE OF THE GOLDEN HORDE
A quiet pagoda, and the death of an innocent courier took Charlie Chan to the Mainland — and a rendezvous with terror!

☐ . . . THE PAWNS OF DEATH
Two murders, two locked rooms! Charlie Chan found that the challenges of the chess tourney could prove fatal gambits!

RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC.
8230 Beverly Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA. 90048

Please send me the back copies of CHARLIE CHAN MYSTERY MAGAZINE checked off in small boxes above. I enclose 50¢ for each issue in full payment.

NAME .....
ADDRESS .....
CITY, STATE, ZIP .....

Please print MARCH—1975

by

PHILIP

HALDEMAN

Tales of the supernatural, of the eerie, of the bizarre and of science fiction do not often find their way into the pages of a mystery magazine. Yet, there are many such tales which are eminently suitable for our readers. As we announced in the September, 1974 issue of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, *we have decided to publish the best of these "different" stories. To date, we have given you an extraordinary tale of exorcism and a remarkable story of witchcraft. Each of these stories, though not strictly within our format, was so excellent as to almost require publication. Likewise, Philip Haldeman's delightful and suspenseful "Heart of the Matter" is a story we were unable to pass by. It is one of the finest suspense stories we have read, and is, with its incredible and chilling conclusion, reminiscent of the very best tales of Edgar Allen Poe. Indeed, we would be very surprised if readers were not, by the end of the story, reminded of the master's* The Tell-Tale Heart, *though Haldeman's original twist makes this, indeed, a "different" story.*

TRUE!—neurotic. Very, very dreadfully neurotic I had been and am; but why will you say that I am paranoid? Would a rational man consciously try to bring about totally unwarranted destruction?

You may say that is what I have tried to do—that it was madness that set off the bomb during my sojourn from the mundane existence I had honestly tried to tolerate.

I had tried. Unlike other men, my employment had sharpened my senses—not destroyed, not dulled them. Above all, the sense of responsibility to myself enhanced. It was not madness, but the desire to escape.

They are to blame for the

HEART OF THE MATTER

deeds, not I, and still they accuse me!

The corporation filled me with a sense of guilt. Yes, I needed them. Some things are inescapable. But in both that needing and despising came the only driving motivation in my life. I really had nothing against any of them. I was treated well for the most part, and paid well. Nothing should have been wrong.

The job itself was normal enough, and I was certainly blessed with a good sense of security. Coming to work was satisfactory, leaving was satisfactory, and the time between was satisfactory. Yes, yes, all satisfactory.

Why then, should they accuse me of maliciousness? It wasn't until later that I began to be conscious of my surroundings, of the corporate policies that

were constantly vexing me: the environmental disregard, the routine and meaningless tasks, the public fraud!

A new kind of consciousness came over me, a hatred for those objects and people that surrounded me, a loathing for the meaninglessness of my position, and especially for my employers, who were the instruments of what I despised.

It was the old man I hated most.

He had the mind of an exploiter and the eye of a tyrant. Whenever he passed me in the corridor, my blood ran cold. His only thoughts were of and for himself, his only law that of personal and selfish gain. He became the symbol of all that I loathed about the corporate system, and I came to avoid him as best I could, but his lingering presence constantly reminded me of the values under which I toiled.

I began to experience mild disorders of mind, which usually manifested themselves in states of horrible depression. That the very air around me was being polluted by the old man's corporate evil was further abhorrent to me. Why should a man be exposd to such systems of crushing efficiency? To be at once exploited and expendable? No. It is not at all impossible to say how the idea of revenge first entered my brain. . . .

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen *me*. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution, with what foresight, with what righteousness I went to work! Fearing the scorn of my associates, I kept my thoughts to myself, and began to conceive secret devices in order to attain the semblance of revenge.

At first I would make small errors in my work, errors which would be easily corrected when passed on, and probably not mentioned. The risk was small, owing to the lack of consciousness of my fellow employees, who would automatically perform their necessary tasks and pass over the source of any small problems that might arise, they themselves being members of the very system of which *I* had a full understanding.

Then I began to misplace things, hiding them between benches, desks, or in drawers. This in turn led to the actual stealing of certain insignificant items of the trade, the most common being pencils, instruction booklets, and computer punch cards, of which many could be found. I could easily stuff my inside pockets with all

sorts of sundry items and carry them unnoticed on the way out.

But soon these small ways of getting back at my antagonists were not enough. I became more and more irritated, and soon my pleasure in perpetrating harmless mischiefs gave way to the idea of ridding myself of the corporate evil forever.

I WAS NEVER better on the job than during the whole week before I blew up the factory. I arrived precisely on time, lingering until the exact second of the hour if need be. Going to work diligently, I attended to project after project as carefully as the mathematician performs his technical manipulations. Every detail was attended to. The tyranical eye of the old man himself might well have been watching at my shoulder and I could not have feigned greater disguise.

Accordingly, the department director praised my work and smiled with fake pride. It would have taken more than a mere mortal to suspect my inner thoughts. But I didn't stop there. In the evening I would return to the premises and observe every aspect of the exterior, the entrance, the parking lot, the windows, the cyclone fencing, and the arrangement of the light poles.

I examined every detail before deciding on an escape route. The method of entering had been worked out long beforehand. The design was a modicum of simplicity, for the very praise I had received, the very values and ideals of the system I had set out to destroy, provided the easiest method of carrying out my destruction: I would simply tell them I would like to work overtime!

Now do you say that I am mad? Revolutionaries, such as have existed in our time, have never proceeded with such belief in their cause as I.

The overthrow of the institution for which I worked became the soul of my existence. The bomb was made at night in the basement of my house. I constructed the device with great care. The explosion would be followed by fire.

That day I was particularly observant of my surroundings, taking great delight in the stupidity of the people around me. That they were not frightened, that they were not even suspicious was further to my credit. I studied the dreary faces as they went through the routine of their work, the lifeless chain in the creation of the product, the mass of individuality stamped into the bleakness of conformity, the anticipation of freedom as the hour ap-

proached quitting time. My lunch pail, set out plainly on a table top, was not given a passing glance.

As the office vacated, I remained calm. The movement of people subsided, the lights were shut off, and I waited until I became sure of the emptiness and the sensation of being in the building alone. The silence, the peace, the solitude—all created a sense of triumph on the fact of my success thus far. There was not a sound, except that which emanated from the clock on the wall nearby. I took up the lunch pail and cautiously proceeded down the hallway past the neat little sign that said "Think".

Can the reader conceive of the silence that met my footsteps? That it was dark, that the building was empty, these things were certain enough; but it was the silence that pleased me most, the singular absence of noise that is so rare in the Technological Catastrophe!

How strange it is to marvel in the rarity of quietude! How wonderful the sense of tranquility to which few people have become accustomed, the sense of being isolated from all things cursed with incessant activity. Here, at day's end, were the hollow caverns of the old man's consciousness, the tombs of the corporate plunder, the empty halls where no reminders could be seen of the day's endless corporate ego.

These were my thoughts as I walked toward the center of the building, passing the rows of doorways occupied during the day by the executives of the company, the magistrates of economy, taskmasters of the schedule, until, finally, I came to my temporary destination.

The computer complex was the spot I had chosen to begin the sabotage. My good relations with the director had enabled me to borrow the access key so necessary to my "work". Once inside, I carefully opened the lunch pail and took out the bomb. A flashlight was cleverly placed in the concave lid of the pail, and this I used to reveal the panel which unfastened at the back of one of the computer banks. I set the timer of my device and placed it, oh so carefully, into the small black space that was opened up by the removed panel. I then lifted the sheet into place, and turned the small screws into their respective holes.

When I had finished, I stepped back as if to view my finished product, which was hidden inside the subservient computer. For a moment I imagined I could hear it ticking, but this was merely a vague notion, for I had concocted it to

be extremely quiet, lest some wandering night watchman, unknown to me, might hear it. But I sensed the noise, and though I could see or hear no one, I felt the urgent need to be gone.

I took the lunch pail and flashlight from the floor and turned to hurry out of the building. It was at that moment I became aware of the menacing figure which was walking down the corridor toward the room in which I helplessly stood. This was the insidiousness: He was in the very path of my escape!

I stood silent.

My legs turned limp beneath me as I thought of running past him and out, but I was unable to force my immediate surprise into the security of confidence. I would greet this night watchman, for so he must be, without worry.

What had I to fear? The bomb, successfully planted within the computer, was not now to be heard. There was only a fleeting concern, undoubtedly due to my own nervous awareness of the device. The explosion would not occur for some time yet, time enough for the luxury of a brief encounter. I greeted my unexpected guest by turning on the flashlight and pointing it to the floor for reflected light. I would calmly explain my way out and be gone.

IT WAS NOT the hypothesized night watchman that entered into that chamber. *It was the old man himself who came across the room toward me!*

Though the light was dim, I could see the tyrannical eye fall upon me, could feel the remoteness of the soul I experienced whenever I chanced to meet him, the beginnings of the utter depression of mind that was the result of his presence.

He spoke in tones that were at first suspicious of my late hour. He had heard a noise. But there was no reason for him to be suspicious, I told him. I had left the lunch pail in the room earlier in the day, had been working late, and had come to retrieve it before going home.

In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I pointed my flashlight directly at the spot where I had been busy planting the bomb. I laughed at the incident of running into each other at this late hour, and soon he became sure of my sincerity, soberly trading the levity of my talk with his own empty conversation about the company.

His talk of profit and loss was leisurely. I had satisfied him. My manner had convinced him that nothing was amiss. I

had the time to observe and loath him as he continued his chatting, and I came to a full realization of the intensity with which I hated and despised him, of the greed and inhumanity that resided within him, the coldness that allowed him to destroy and pollute.

Our talk was casual, but my mood began to change from confidence to mild impatience. Whether he observed this or not I cannot say, but my triumph at the success of the deceit quickly began to subside into an awareness of the length of our conversation.

True, the time bomb had been set to give me time enough to escape, but had that time now begun to expire? How difficult it is to tell the lapse of time without reference to a watch. And what was the time I had first entered the room to set the bomb?

I am certain that I grew extremely pale in the dim light, though my humorless companion made no mention of it. I tried to convince him in soft tones that it was late and he should be gone. No, he would yet be looking over some accounts.

I tried unsuccessfully to move toward the hall, but he bade me stay and asked unimportant questions about the nature of my work. I said it was getting late and yes, yes, I was satisfied with my job. I was edging toward panic, but he took no apparent notice. He was used to observing nothing about his fellow men.

The coldness I felt, the depression, the horror of being close to the symbol of my anger convinced me of it. I thought that I would soon lose my mind, whether from that depression of which I have spoken, or from the knowledge of the bomb, I cannot say. Both now pervaded my brain, and for a moment I thought I would murder the old man as he stood, his being so revolted me. But I could not. I could only remain in knowing disguise, waiting for some sign that the bomb would go off —but of course there would be none!

He continued to talk of trivialities, of vague notions and selfish ideals. I could not reveal myself. I had to move him to the door. Slowly, I began to walk—a bit too fast?—toward the hall. He seemed for a moment as if he would again ask me to stay, but no, now he too was walking.

We must, I knew, get through the hall and out of the building. If I should run and he should somehow survive, I would be held even more in suspect of the crime. I would

have to murder him, but there was no time. I would have to chance the explosion. Imagine the terror I felt as we thus talked and moved—oh so slowly—out toward and through the corridor. I was pale, frightened, and shaking, but still, he was talking on, still not aware!

The hour had come. There was a sudden, deafening noise from behind us, and I was seized with shock and pain as we were smashed to the floor. The explosion shattered the computer complex into fragments, followed by the fire which spread rapidly to the surrounding buildings. The city awoke with sirens, and as the old man and I were carried from the burning building to the ambulance, the orange flames danced in the night and people stood on the sidewalks watching the extravaganza.

The deed was finished.

Neither judge nor jury faced me when I awakened. It is true that I had not been discovered, that I was free of all suspicion, that I had been clever, yes, very clever. There was only the bleakness of the hospital room in which I was placed. There were only the white-clothed physicians around my bed, speaking mildly, in reassuring tones.

The old man had died. I had lived. The operation had been a miracle of new medical technology. The doctors entered my room and smiled. They spoke among themselves of the accident and the method of my rescue, of the emergency scene in the operating chamber. They noted the now-excellent state of my health, considering what they had had to work with, and talked jovially to each other.

They were making a mockery of my horror. This I thought and this I think. Soon I could bear those clinical, hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die!

"Villains!" I shrieked, and put my trembling hand to my bandaged chest. "Dissemble no more, I admit the deed!"

The sensation through my fingertips was more than I could bear. I knew what they had done. *It was the beating of his hideous heart!*

Be Sure to Read NEXT MONTH'S "Different" Story:

VOICES IN THE LIGHT

by JERRY JACOBSON

It was a typical New Years Eve — with all the noise, drinking, and general celebrations — until they found the police chief in the lobby with his head shattered by a bullet. Had someone he trusted done it — and why?

WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

by EDWIN P. HICKS

JOE CHAVISKI, retired Chief of Detectives, Fort Sanders, Arkansas, sipped at his glass of beer with a feeling of well-being and contentment. It was eleven p.m., Central Standard Time, the last night of the year.

Already the New Year had arrived in New York and the Eastern Time Zone. He had been listening to Guy Lombardo's orchestra, and now he was watching swarming, riotous Times Square on his television set. . .The telephone rang.

"Joe for God's sake get down to the station as fast as you can. We're going to need you." It was Chief Detective Marty Sauer.

"What's wrong Marty?"

"Chief O'Toole—and Larry Knight—they've been shot to death down here at the station!"

"My God!" said Joe. "I'm on my way!"

He strapped on his thirty-eight, grabbed his coat and overcoat, and ran for his car.

Chief O'Toole dead—Larry Knight, the radio night dispatcher dead! And at the police station!

Chaviski raced, cutting in and around cars, some of which

Featuring: JOE CHAVISKI

were weaving suspiciously. The police parking lot was spilling out policemen as he arrived. All of them headed for the station on the run. And Chaviski was with them.

The interior was a scene of horror. The body of Chief O'Toole was slumped forward from the chair of the desk sergeant and over the desk. He had been shot in the back of his head, and his forehead was virtually blown away, where the bullet had come out. Blood covered half of the desk.

Curled around the corner of the console of the radio dis-

patching set was the body of Larry Knight. Two bullet holes were in his chest. His empty holster and cartridge belt hung from a knob on the wall of the radio room, and his own thirty-eight lay on the floor near his outstretched right hand.

Johnnie Hopp, technician and identification officer, was on the way, Sauer said. Sauer had ordered the bodies not be touched until Hopp arrived and made pictures.

Desk Sergeant Charlie Tanner was talking, "Chief came in about forty-five minutes ago. He told me he was going to meet a guy at the station, but he didn't tell me who. He said I looked hungry, and I could go over to the Broadway Grill and get a bite to eat if I wanted to. He would hold down the desk while I was gone. I took him up on it, and Larry hollered at me and told me to bring him back a piece of pumpkin or custard pie. He give me half a dollar to pay for it. That's all I know. When I got back with the pie, things were like this, and Tim Hickman was at the radio sending out alarms for all cars."

Hickman, deputy sheriff, nodded. "I was upstairs in the sheriff's office, taking calls on our radio. I heard three shots loud and close. I thought for a moment somebody was celebrating New Year's, but then I thought again that that would be queer—shooting loud firecrackers right under the nose of the police, and decided to investigate. So I come down the steps from my office and come in the front door of the station, and this is what I found. There was no one here; not a soul. But both bodies were like you see them. Shot to death. I started calling in all cars over the radio. Marty was the first to reach the station, then Sergeant Tanner."

Johnnie Hopp arrived and quietly went to work with his camera. Chief O'Toole's revolver was still in its holster on his hip. Larry Knight had not got off a shot. His weapon, while on the floor, had not been fired recently. A piece of custard pie, in a paper container, and nineteen cents in change, was on top of the radio dispatcher's console, where a stunned Tanner must have put it.

Marty Sauer took over the investigation, with Joe Chaviski, his old boss, at his side. It was evident that the one who killed O'Toole was a person he knew and trusted, since he had allowed the man to walk behind him as he sat at the desk.

While Knight had leaped for his gun which was hanging on

a wall peg in its holster, he had done so, it seemed certain, after the killer had shot Chief O'Toole. But Knight hadn't been quick enough. The killer was familiar with firearms and was a good shot.

The distance from the desk at which the Chief was sitting through the door of the dispatcher's adjoining room and to the radio console was about twenty feet. In his early days on the force, Chaviski recalled, there had been several instances of gun battles between officers and criminals shooting at a similar range, in which nobody was hit, despite the hail of lead. Those were the days before the pistol practice range for the department, and excited men, whether law officers or desperadoes, were excited men, and in such a state few men are good with the short gun.

One by one, Marty Sauer summoned the officers into Chief O'Toole's private office—Detective Harrington, Detective Thompson, Detective White, and Officers Ruffino, Bagby, Jaggers, Colombo, and on down the list.

"When and where did you get the news?" Sauer asked each man.

"Bagby and I were cruising at the east end of Garrison Avenue," said Ruffino.

"I was on that stake-out with Thompson," said Detective Harrington. "You know the one O'Toole put us on."

And so on.

Hopp came in. He had found the battered bullet that had killed O'Toole, lodged in the panelling of the property and registration desk, at the side of the entrance cage. "Forty-five automatic, steel jacketed bullet. It had hit the top of the desk and ricocheted into the panelling," he said. "Both of the bullets went straight through Knight, and lodged in the wall at the back of the radio room. I've got all three bullets."

"I don't get it," said Sauer. "From what Hickman said, he must have been down here within thirty seconds after the shooting, and he didn't see anybody come in or leave. I don't like the looks of the whole business. You know good and well Chief knew the man who shot him and didn't do any more than look up when he came in. He wasn't any stranger."

Joe Chaviski nodded. "And if it had been anybody—just anybody from out in town, he would have asked what they wanted—perhaps got up from the desk to see what they wanted. The average person doesn't just barge into a police station and circle around behind the Chief of Police."

"Right," said Sauer. "Do you reckon some guy could possibly have hidden in the rest room or Hopp's office and slipped in behind the Chief, or maybe come in from the corridor the back way?"

"I doubt it. You and I know somebody would have been in the file room during the evening, and nobody was in the traffic office across the hall. You always keep that corridor door locked anyway at night, don't you—unless Captain Martin of the traffic department is working in there after hours?"

"He wasn't tonight," said Sauer. "He was attending a watch party in the dining room in his church basement. He told me where he would be if anything came up, it being New Year's eve you know, and if things started getting rocky."

There was only one prisoner on his feet in the police runaround, a shriveled-up alcoholic named Watkins, while three more drunks lay soundly sleeping on the cement floor.

Watkins was cold sober now. "No sir," he said from inside the open grill in the door. "I was just coming out of it and was feeling like vomiting, when I heard those three shots. It sounded like dynamite going off, and it made me plumb sober in a minute. I hid over in the corner until I heard somebody sending out distress calls on the radio. Then I peeped out for the first time. Didn't see the guy who did the shooting. And these other three was out on the floor, just like you see them now. Say, will you call Carey Statham for me? I want to make bond."

"Okay," said Sauer.

From outdoors came the clanging of bells, the distant popping of firecrackers. Cars began blaring their horns. Joe Chaviski looked up at the clock. The New Year had arrived, Central Standard time!

"What a hell of a way to start off a new year," he muttered half to himself.

Marty Sauer nodded, then stiffened in his chair. "Joe, you've got to go with me."

"With you where?"

"To tell Mrs. O'Toole and Mrs. Knight what has happened."

There was no sleep for any of them the remainder of the night. From time to time members of the day shift came in, news having reached them of what had happened. Sauer sent them home again. A general meeting of all officers was called at ten a.m.

Things moved swiftly that morning. By ten a.m., Mayor Jim Fryer had posted a $10,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of

the killer. The seventy-five member police staff contributed an extra thousand dollars in ten and twenty dollar bills to be used by the force in springing a lead on the crime. And Marty Sauer was appointed Acting Chief of Police. The job would be made permanent at the next meeting of the City Directors.

Marty Sauer and Joe Chaviski were in agreement. The killer most certainly must be a member of the force, since Chief O'Toole had no more than looked up when his slayer entered the station.

"He probably spoke to Chief and headed for the drinking fountain, behind the desk where Chief was sitting," said Sauer.

Chaviski nodded. "And after he killed Chief and Larry Knight, he went out the corridor door and left by one of the street doors to the building opposite the way Deputy Sheriff Hickman came running. Hickman said he came down the side entrance steps to the building and entered the police station from the outside. All doors to the City-County building, except the one leading by the Sheriff's office, are locked at night. But they could be opened from the inside."

"Yes," said Sauer. "The killer had his car waiting parked

across the street in front of the postoffice, or around at the back—it could have been anywhere."

"They have a guard on duty at the postoffice," said Chaviski. "The lobby is open all the time. People go there all hours of the night to mail a letter or to pick up mail from lock boxes. Or like you say, he could have left by opening the door on the south end of the main corridor and got his car on Parker avenue fifty feet away. Very few cars pass along Parker late at night. He could have reached his car and been clear across town in a minute—or even over in Oklahoma."

Johnnie Hopp had made enlarged photographs of the bodies of Chief O'Toole and Larry Knight, in the positions

they were found, and later lying on the mortuary stretchers.

One by one at the end of the ten o'clock meeting, members of the force passed by for a look at the pictures. The window shades of the meeting room had been raised, and the cold morning sunlight of the first day of the New Year shone squarely in the faces of the men as they studied the pictures.

Joe Chaviski sat solemnly on the other side of the table as the officers passed by. One by one the officers turned away some of them wiping away tears, others blowing their noses. Some of them bit down on their lips to conceal their emotion. One man ran for the rest room, where he vomited.

When they had all filed out of the room, Sauer nodded to Hopp. He picked up the pictures for his file.

"Fill me in," Chaviski said to Sauer. "This narcotics ring. You and Chief were working with the federal agents but something always happened to tip them off. Is that right?"

"That's right," said Sauer. "That's how we knew some guy on the force was getting word to them. We never could make our move. And of course we didn't want to show our hand until we had them good—get them with a big shipment. There was a wide-open leak somewhere—but we never could finger the man who was tipping them off. Yesterday morning Chief told me he had something for sure. He was going to talk to a guy around midnight last night. Then he clammed up. You know how he could get at times. He was especially touchy about this leak on the force."

"Yes," said Chaviski. "I know how he hated dirty cops."

"Finding the rotten apple was more important to Chief than the dope ring itself. You know and I know who's running the dope into our town —Lee Hickerson—just like he's had a finger in every racket in this part of the country. We'll get Hickerson all right, and soon. We've been ready to move with the federals a half dozen times. But always he'd cleared his cupboards, and we learned he had cleared them, twenty-four hours or so before the ball started to roll. Chief and I went over every man on the force, every angle on every single fellow wearing a badge, but we never did come up with anything."

LEE HICKERSON was one of the hundreds of people who attended the funerals of Chief O'Toole and Larry Knight. He also sent flowers.

The following day Joe Chaviski got word by way of a cab driver to Barney Aswell to come see him at his house at nine that night. Barney was of the underworld. One day, years ago when Chaviski was Chief of Detectives on the force, he had taken pity on Barney's only son, who had got in some minor trouble, had released him without charge. The youth had entered the Navy and had made a nice career out of it. Barney had been everlastingly grateful, and had proved to be the best stool pigeon Chaviski ever had.

And the most loyal.

Promptly at nine o'clock that night Barney put in his appearance. The night was cold. Barney's withered frame was shaking. Chaviski had counted on this and had plenty of hot chili—Barney's favorite food—and hot, black coffee ready to warm his insides. They talked about the old days and about Barney's son—now a Chief Petty Officer with the Seventh Fleet.

After the third bowl of chili, Barney sat back in his chair, and with his round, green eyes blinking, his face took on an owlish expression. "Well Mister Joe, what did you want to see me about?"

Joe Chaviski filled Barney's coffee mug again. "What do you know about Detective Bill Branford?"

Barney put down the mug and sat up straight in his chair. "You mean Ringo Branford?"

"Yes. Ringo."

Barney ran his hand through his sparse grey hair and began to chuckle. "You've been away from the force a long time Joe Chaviski. Time sure passes fast, a lot faster than folks keep count of."

"What are you getting at Barney?"

"Ringo made detective three years ago. He's been on the force only five years altogether. He's slicker than owl grease and smoother than silk and satin. Makes a big showing picking on little fellers. You've seen all them wrist watches he wears from his wrist clear up to his elbows, and a half dozen rings on each hand?"

"Sure," said Chaviski, "but what's that to do with how long I've been off the force?"

"If you had been on the force five years ago—four years and eleven months ago you'd have been asking that same question. What about Bill Branford? Maybe not to me, but to yourself, and to a lot of other people. O'Toole has been snowed under by the number of arrests he makes. He thinks Ringo is just another trader on the force. Giving the prisoners a little

cash for rings, watches and the like and selling them at a profit. No harm in that. Cops have been doing that ever since people have been put in jail. But really it ain't a good thing. You know that. Usually a cop who makes money on the side like that is open for bigger deals —wide open."

"Barney, Chief O'Toole was shot and killed New Year's Eve, and Larry Knight was shot and killed with him. Both of them were my friends. You know what killing a cop does to a police force. But Barney it's ten times worse when a policeman kills a policeman—or two policemen in this instance. We're going to turn over heaven and earth until we get the killer. I have a hunch. It's more than a hunch. And you know the cop I'm thinking about. You can move around where I can't move around and where no officer of the law can move. You've got a good pair of ears on you, and you know where to listen good."

"I'm still a poor man Mr. Chaviski. Much as I'd like to help you out for old times' sake, I've still got to make a living for my old lady. It ain't worth laying my head on the chopping block just to do you a favor."

"Ten thousand U.S. dollars isn't peanuts Barney. You could leave here and be fixed the rest of your life—the way you manage to get by on nothing."

"That reward is for the arrest and conviction of the guy ain't it? That will take months before you get a conviction, and then there will be an appeal and more months. In the meantime I'm cooling my heels. One night there's a knock on my door, and goons pick me up and they take me out in the country some place and put a bullet through my guts."

Joe Chaviski nodded. Barney wasn't any fool, and what he said was true. "That's right. But there is another angle you've overlooked. The boys have made up a thousand dollar pot just for information leading to the arrest of the killer—payable when Marty Sauer gives the word, and if you cooperate as you always have with me, the thousand bucks is handed to you quietly and nothing comes out publicly. Then you and your wife slip out of town, leaving your address with me, and when the guy is finally convicted and appeals taken care of, the other ten grand will follow. You have my word of honor you'll get it."

"I don't have to tell you Joe that this is dangerous as hell—and more'n anything I ever did for you put together during all the years you was on

the force. Don't never mention my name in court or with the cops or anywhere else anytime—understand."

"You don't need to tell me that Barney. I never did let you down. I'll always protect you at my end. You look after yourself at your end."

"A thousand bucks just for enough evidence to put the right guy in stir?"

"Make it air tight—an air tight lead—and the thousand dollars is yours when you deliver. But move fast. Move in while they are still talking and excited. They'll be clamming up soon, and you won't get a whisper out of any of them."

Barney nodded. "The waves are still moving out from where the rock was tossed into the water, Mister Joe. You know and I know why Chief O'Toole and poor Larry Knight were knocked off. Narcotics. O'Toole was working quiet, but he was getting close to where the hair was short. He was getting ready to put the finger on the guy in the department who was ratting on him when them dope raids were planned. The rat knowed it, so he had to bump O'Toole off, and poor Larry was there when it happened, so he had to go too."

"That's the way I figure it," said Chaviski.

"If I turn up the evidence you want and something happens to me before the rat is in the pen, will you see to it that my old lady gets the ten thousand?"

"You have my promise," said Chaviski.

Barney reached out a gnarled hand. Chaviski took it in his big mitt. "I'll be needing some more marijuana right away," said Barney. "Will go after it tomorrow. Keep the boys off my tail till I can come through for you."

"Nobody will tail you. We're not after dope now. We're after a cop killer."

Barney Aswell rose.

"I'll call a cab," said Chaviski.

"No. I don't want anybody more than I have knowing I even been close to you. I got my rep to keep up. I'll walk."

Barney Aswell drew his tattered overcoat closely about his spare frame and strode out into the night.

IT WAS ALMOST exactly twenty-four hours later that Barney phoned him. "I'm talking from a telephone booth," he said. "Here's your tip. It was Ringo all right."

"Okay," said Chaviski, "what about the evidence?"

"You'll find the forty-five at the bottom of the Arkansas River. He throwed it off the Garrison Avenue bridge. Get

divers to work and find the gun, and you can take it from there. You can nail him for sure." Barney hung up.

Joe Chaviski swore. That was Barney all right. He hadn't told how he had found out—how sure his evidence was—only where it was. The rest was up to him and the police department. Always in the past Barney had worked this way. His tips were as brief as possible, he put in no overtime work to save police labor, but his tips always had been right.

Joe Chaviski was with Marty Sauer first thing the following morning. "The gun that killed Chief and Larry is at the bottom of the Arkansas River," he said. "The killer tossed it off the bridge."

Sauer whistled. "Level with me Joe. Who's the guy?"

"You've got a bad temper Marty. I don't know whether I should tell you or not. You'll see red and want to go after him."

"Joe," said Sauer sharply, "dammit I'm no longer a dumb rookie plainclothesman working under your guiding hand. I'm the Acting Chief of Police!"

"We haven't got the evidence yet. We won't have until we get the gun and can tie it to him. I was fairly certain since the meeting we had the morning after the killing. It's your sterling detective, Ringo Branford."

"Ringo?"

"Yes. He's the rat in the stable. He's the tip-off guy employed by Lee Hickerson."

"How good is your source?"

"Let's forget my source. Use your head. I'm sworn to protect the guy. You know him."

"Barney Aswell," said Sauer.

"I ain't commenting," Chaviski said. "But the sooner we get divers working beneath that bridge the sooner we get the gun."

Marty Sauer nodded. "I've got a lead that adds up to the circumstantial evidence. The woman who is one of the federal guards at the postoffice, Mary Moore, heard the shots and saw the guy run from the side of the City-County building."

"What!"

"She was sitting on her stool behind the counter there in the postoffice lobby, looking out the window and thinking about the new year. She heard three rapid shots over towards the City-County building. They were kind of muffled, of course—and she figured it was firecrackers and was a bit surprised that someone would be firing them so near the police station. Some half minute later she saw a man run from the west side of the building, coming out from under the steps

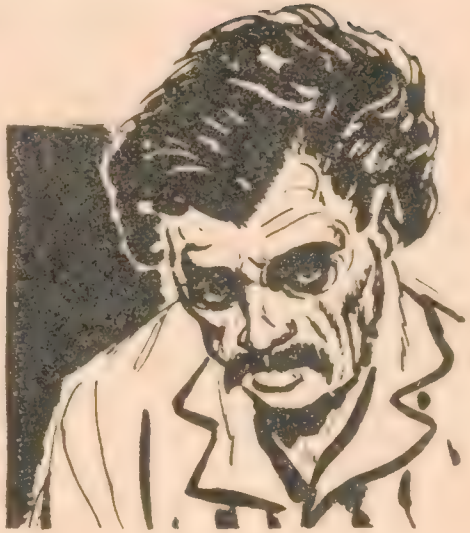
and apparently from the basement door.

"The man ran and got into a light colored car which was parked across the street from the City-County building and in front of the postoffice. It was too far for her to get the license number, of course, but she thinks it was an Oldsmobile —probably a last year's model. She's trained in those things, the same as we are."

"Things are adding up. That was Ringo's car as sure as hell!"

"It sure looks like it. You know, like I've told you, I never could quite like the guy. He is smooth and sharp, but all this petty stuff—rings, and watches. I never made a buck off a prisoner in my life. Maybe he got ambitious for higher things and bigger money."

In about a half hour, two divers were put quietly to work, searching the bottom of the Arkansas River, starting on the east bank and following the right side of the bridge. Despite insulated clothing which the men wore beneath their diving suits, the work was bitterly cold, and the two had to come up frequently to warm up in cars with the heaters on. Just before the end of their shift on the second day, they hit the jackpot. One of the divers found the forty-five automatic near



the middle of the river. Three cartridges were missing from the magazine.

"If this is Branford's," said Chaviski, "you know the next step."

Sauer nodded. "The pawn shops."

"I'd start even closer to the police station. Carey Statham's, the jail bondsman."

"Right!" said Sauer. "Of course!"

Statham's office was on Hotel Alley, within half a block of the City-County building. He was the leading bondsman in town. They took the forty-five to him directly from the river.

Statham checked the serial number of the weapon against his ledger. He nodded. "I took that gun in two years ago in place of cash in making a bond. I sold it a month later at a

loss—for only forty bucks to Ringo Branford."

"Let's go get the s.o.b.," said Sauer. Unconsciously his right hand slipped to his own snub-nosed thirty-eight in his shoulder holster.

"Take it easy," cautioned Chaviski. "Let's go see Johnnie Hopp and let him tie it up."

Hopp grinned with delight when he saw the forty-five, reached for it, took it into his laboratory and closed the door. Chaviski glanced at the clock. It was 4:45. The night officers, Branford among them, would be coming down any minute now from Municipal Court.

Joe Chaviski put his hand on Marty Sauer's shoulder. "Let's step in your office a second, I want to talk to you," he said.

Chaviski closed the door behind them, reached out suddenly and seized Sauer's gun.

"Joe, what do you mean?" Sauer was indignant and reached for the weapon.

"I'm keeping you out of trouble," said Chaviski. "Your neck is as red as a turkey gobbler's right now. You're liable to shoot the guy on sight." He walked around Sauer's desk and put the gun in the top drawer. "It's your temper Marty," he said. "You go off half-cocked now like I've seen you do in the past, and you're in deep trouble."

There was a tap on the door. Chaviski opened it. It was Detective Branford. "Come in," said Chaviski, "come in Branford." Chaviski maneuvered to a position behind Ringo. Sauer, holding his emotions as best he could, was seated behind the desk.

"How's the search going?" Branford asked.

Marty Sauer dropped his head and looked discouraged. "Not worth a damn. We're calling it off."

"I was afraid of that," said the detective. "It's like looking for a needle in a haystack, at midnight, blindfolded." Branford turned and walked out.

Chaviski relaxed for the first time. "Good work Marty. We can't move until Hopp gives us the go-ahead."

Hopp took his time. The night officers left the station, and with them Ringo Branford. "Let's go grab a bite," Chaviski suggested to Sauer.

When they returned to the station, Johnnie Hopp was waiting for them. "It's the right gun all right," he said. "I waited until all the boys had left, then fired a couple of the shells through some junk and into the wall. All the lines match up the same as on the three bullets the killer fired. It will stand the test in any criminal lab anywhere."

Marty Sauer shook Hopp's hand.

Joe Chaviski hung around the office with Sauer. They sipped coffee, chatted with the boys as they brought in drunks, reckless drivers. At nine o'clock Ringo came in with an alley-rat looking man, whom he docketed for petty larceny. The fellow had been going through cars at a parking lot.

Chaviski and Sauer were seated on the side of the desk sergeant's desk. Ringo was in a jovial mood. "Hiyah Joe," he said, "I forgot to shake hands with you earlier. How's the old war horse?" He stuck out his hand.

Chaviski seized the hand, and with lightning speed turned it behind Branford's back in a hammer-lock, while his left arm snaked in from behind and surrounded his neck with strangling force.

Sauer leaped for Ringo's gun, but Chaviski, still afraid of Sauer's temper, whirled Branford to one side, kneed him from behind, and put him face down against the floor. He nodded to Jim Freeland, a rookie cop.

"Get his gun," he said, "and don't let it go off accidentally."

They booked Branford on a charge of murder, but Chaviski, having snapped the cuffs on the detective, took him personally on the elevator to the county jail on the fourth floor. Freeland accompanied him.

"Thanks for keeping your head and letting me handle it," Chaviski said when he and Sauer were alone again in the office.

Marty Sauer grinned sheepishly. "I grabbed for his gun. I wasn't going to shoot him. I was just going to disarm him."

"Okay," said Chaviski. "Ringo's goose is cooked. Sit down and write out a check for one thousand dollars payable to Barney Aswell."

"Gladly. I'll have to get Captain Martin to sign it—he's head of the Police Association you know."

He started for the door, then stopped. "There's one thing I haven't figured out yet," he said. "You told me you had a good idea at the meeting the morning after the murders, who had done it."

"Yes," said Chaviski, "and I was right."

"How?"

"A little trick I learned years ago," Chaviski said. "I got every one of the officers to look at those gruesome photographs that Johnnie Hopp made of the bodies of Chief O'Toole and Larry Knight. That one of Chief's forehead, where the forty-five bullet blew his

forehead away was something awful. One guy, you remember, ran and vomited—"

"So?"

"I was sitting close where I could see the faces of each officer. The pupils in the eyes of every man narrowed sharply, with one exception as they looked at the wounds. The single exception was that of Detective Branford. His pupils dilated. He was happy because he had got O'Toole off his tail. The Chief, like you say, had known for a long time there was a leak in the force, and had been investigating quietly. Ringo knew he was getting close."

"Who was Chief waiting to meet that night?"

"It could have been anyone—even Ringo himself."

"If he suspected Ringo, why did he let him get behind him?"

"You know that yourself," said Chaviski. "You suspect a guy. You don't let him know you suspect him until you are ready to spring the trap. He probably just nodded to Ringo when he came in, and went on reading the paper or whatever he was doing. He had no idea, of course, that Ringo was going to blow his head off. And poor Larry got his because he had witnessed the shooting. He went for his own gun, but he wasn't quick enough."

Marty Sauer stuck out his hand to Joe Chaviski. Chaviski noted with pleasure that the red now was entirely gone from the Acting Chief's neck.

Coming in the April Issue:

MAD OWNEY MADDEN

A Thrilling New TRUE CRIME Masterpiece

by DAVID MAZROFF

Murder and mayhem and Mad Owney Madden. That was the trio unleashed on the public when the little cockney from London's slums landed in New York. Labyrinthine was his mind, dark the soul of this twisted genius, whose penchant for crime led him to succeed at every unholy activity, and made him Death's paranoid partner!

---

11 BRAND-NEW MYSTERIES FOR $1.

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER
His newest Perry Masons:

1. The Case of the Postponed Murder. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)

2. The Case of the Fenced-In Woman. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)

J. J. MARRIC
3. Gideon's Press. Scotland Yard foils a plot. (Publ. Ed. $4.95)

NGAIO MARSH
4. Black As He's Painted. Assassins at the diplomatic garden party. (Publ. Ed. $6.95)

LEN DEIGHTON
5. Spy Story. Another spell-binder by the writer of "The Ipcress File." (Publ. Ed. $6.95)

DONALD WESTLAKE
6. Jimmy The Kid. The unlucky masterminds of "Hot Rock" and "Bank Shot" try again: with a kidnapping. (Publ. Ed. $6.95)

GEORGE HARMON COXE
7. The Inside Man. What happened to the dead sky-jacker's $450,000 booty? (Publ. Ed. $5.95)

BRIAN GARFIELD
8. The Threepersons Hunt. A hair-raising chase after an escaped convict—by the author of the movie hit, "Death Wish." (Publ. Ed. $6.95)

JOHN D. MACDONALD
9. A Deadly Shade of Gold. The new Travis McGee adventure. (Publ. Ed. $7.50)

MIGNON EBERHART
10. Danger Money. Brand-new by the "Queen" of suspense. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)

GEORGES SIMENON
11. Maigret and the Millionaires. His latest case. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)

The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, New York 11576

Please enroll me as a member and send at once the 4 double-volumes and 1 triple-volume shown on the other side, containing 11 mysteries. I enclose *no money now.* I may examine my introductory books for one week, then will either accept all 5 volumes for the special new-member price of only $1 (plus postage and handling) or return them and owe nothing. As a member, I will receive free the Club's monthly *Preview* which describes my next selections, but I am not obligated to accept them; I will always have at least 10 days to reject any volume by returning the form provided. I may return any book at the Club's expense for full credit. For each monthly 3-in-1 selection I keep, I will send you only $3.89 (plus postage and handling). I may cancel my membership at any time.

(Books shipped in U.S.A. and Canada only.)

5-WR

Mr.
Ms. _____
(please print plainly)

Address _____

42-5A

City, State _____ Zip _____

In Canada: Enclose this reply card in an envelope and mail to D.B.C. of Canada, Pendragon House Ltd., 69 Bathurst Street, Toronto M5V 2P7, Ontario.

(See other side for further details.)

11 BRAND-NEW MYSTERIES FOR $1.

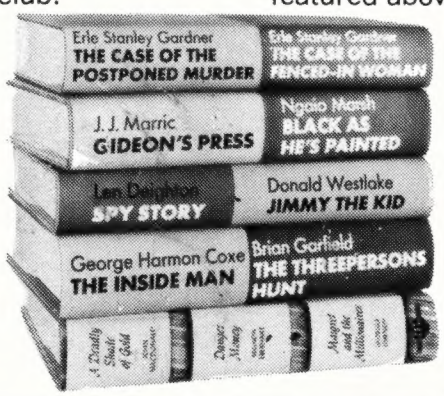
Original publishers' price $70.

For $1, enjoy 11 big thrillers including the two newest Perry Masons. Plus the latest adventures of Travis McGee and Inspector Maigret. Plus brand-new whodunits by Mignon Eberhart, Len Deighton, Brian Garfield and Donald Westlake.

These 11 mysteries in the publishers' original editions cost $70.00. But *you* get all 11 full-length novels, in 5 handsome hardbound volumes, for only $1 — while they last.

We would like to send you these 11 great mysteries to prove to you that The Detective Book Club gives more and asks less of you than any other club.

You'll pay no membership fee. There is no minimum number of books you must buy. You get free the Club's *Preview* which describes each month's selections. You may reject any volume before or after receiving it. And you may cancel at any time.



When you do accept a Club selection, you get three complete, uncondensed detective novels in one handsome, hardbound triple-volume (like the one shown on this page) for only $3.89. That's *less* than you'd have to pay for any *one* of these novels in its trade edition.

The Club's editors select the best from more than 300 mystery books published each year. Their choices are so outstanding that many mystery writers are members, too.

Recent selections have included new thrillers by top authors like those featured above — plus Agatha Christie, Leslie Charteris ("The Saint"), Ellery Queen, Hugh Pentecost, John Creasey, Dick Francis, Rae Foley, and others.

Return the postpaid card below to get your 11 mysteries for $1. The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, New York 11576.

First Class
Permit No. 7
Roslyn, N.Y.

Business Reply Mail
No postage stamp necessary
if mailed in the United States

Postage Will Be Paid By

The Detective Book Club
Roslyn, New York 11576

(See other side for further details.)